

**RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS OF BENGAL
AND
THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC IDEAS**

(1800—1850)

By

APARNA BHATTACHARYA.

Foreword By

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To
the sacred memory
of
my parents.

FOREWORD

The various Hindu religious sects played a significant role in bringing socio-economic and moral regeneration in Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century. No doubt in the later decades this had its impact on the growth of nationalism in this country. The activities of the religious sects become all the more interesting at a time when the Christian missionaries were trying to bring the whole society in Bengal into their fold. Dr(Mrs.) Aparna Bhattacharya in her present work has endeavoured well to focus attention on this important aspect. The activities of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahmo Movement have been well discussed. The present work will be an addition to the study of the religious history of Bengal.

The work is based on Bengali Sources and oral interview of some of the important men of the various religious sects. Taken together they form an impressive body of evidence to support the scholar's views.

K. K. Datta

PREFACE

This work has grown out of my Ph. D. thesis which I submitted some years back to the Patna University. In this work, I have attempted to give a detailed account of the different religious sects which had separately as well as collectively influenced the then Bengali society as a whole. I have devoted special attention to the study of the minor religious sects as well.

The first chapter is on Vaisnavism as propounded by Sri Chaitanya. Its sphere of influence has also been recorded. In the second chapter, I have analysed how Vaisnavism under the powerful impact of sakti-cult and sufism gave birth to new-cults like Kartabhaja and Kishoribhaja which were, however, popular only among the people of so-called backward castes.

In the third chapter, shastric religions such as Saivism and Saktaism have been discussed. How Siva as a house-hold god struck root in people's minds and how Siva's popularity afforded a livelihood for a class of people has also been included in this chapter. This chapter also includes the worship of Goddess Durga as a part of sakti-cult. The worship of Goddess Durga, an old traditional heritage came to be confined among the rich gentry of the urban populace of Bengal. The worship of Goddess Jagadhatri, a simplified version of goddess Durga, has also found place in this chapter. The worship of Satyanarayan, which later on, transferred itself into the worship of Satyapir has also been discussed here. Satyapir is an example of Hindu-Muslim cultural-mingling. It also points to the exceeding influence of Muslim pirs on Hindu mind at least among the poorer sections of population.

In the fourth chapter, the activities of the Christian Missionaries have found place. The fifth chapter is a history of the Brahmo-Samaj with Raja Rammohun Roy as the pivotal personality.

It has been my honest endeavour to examine and assess the relevant materials, that I came across with due care in preparing the thesis. The work is based mostly on old Bengali books and journals. To collect materials, I visited the following libraries : Uttarpur Public Library, Serampore Carey Library, Baranagar Pathbari Ashram, Chaitanya Library, Bangiya-Sahitya Parishad, National Library, Santiniketan Library, Patna College Library and Sinha

Library of Patna. I shall ever remember with gratitude the co-operation and sympathetic treatment which I received from the staff of these libraries. I also collected materials by personal interviews of eminent persons in their respective spheres.

Dr. K. K. Datta, my teacher and a historian of great repute, selected the topic for me. He helped me from time to time by giving valuable suggestions for which I am deeply grateful to him. He has also been kind enough to write the foreword for this monograph, notwithstanding his numerous engagements. I also owe indebtedness to late Dr. B. B. Mazumder, who kindly allowed me to use many rare materials in his personal collection and also lent me the manuscript of 'Srikrishnavilas'. Dr. V. A. Narain, Professor of History, Patna University supervised my work. I shall ever remember his help and co-operation with deep sense of gratitude. I also record my thanks to Shri Benoy Ghose, who kindly allowed me to use some rare materials from his personal library. I am thankful to Dr. P. B. Sinha, who then a Research Scholar in the Bihar Archives, helped me in various ways in completing this thesis. Dr. P. Mahato of the Institute of English, Calcutta, helped in the publication of this work. I thank him heartily. Dr. S. Roy, Reader in History, Burdwan University also deserves thanks for his valuable suggestions given from time to time. Last but not the least, I express my deepest sense of gratitude to my husband Sri Rabindranath Bhattacharya, without whose active help and co-operation, this thesis would not be completed. Discussions with him from time to time were very fruitful.

Diacritical marks have been used in mentioning the ancient and mythological names.

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INTRODUCTION

With the decline of the Mughal power, and the ascendancy of the British in Indian politics in the eighteenth century, old order started changing giving place to new. But the period of transition was unduly long and the political and economic chaos during the transition greatly affected the Indian society, particularly in Bengal.¹

The Permanent Settlement of land revenues of Bengal was chiefly intended to secure the prosperity and happiness of the British subjects in India rather than a measure to alleviate the miseries of the Bengal peasantry.² The East India Company wanted the Indian Zamindars to be like "the landed noblemen of England" and often rewarded the Zamindars with "gold and glory" and the traders and favourites with land grants. The analogy of the landed peers of England influenced the leaders of society in Bengal so much that "from the beginning of the nineteenth century acquisition of 'touzi', big or small, had been the ambition of every well-to-do family in the Permanent Settlement districts,"³ This urge created an artificial pressure on land and the capital for indigenous industries and handicrafts soon dried up paving way for the victory of the British mercantile interests in Bengal.⁴ With the ruin of the indigenous industries and the system of "landlordism with money lending in rural areas", the native talents drifted

1. Ghosal, H. R. *Economic Transition in the Bengal Presidency*, (1793—1833), p. vii, p. 1.

2. Dutt, R. C. *The Economic History of India*, Vol. I, p. 6.

3. Sinha, N. C. *Studies in Indo-British Economy Hunderd Years Ago*, pp. 34—36.

4. Ibid.

to Calcutta for a post in the East India Company or the Agency Houses.⁵ Subsequently, there grew a tremendous craze for acquiring a post under the British and accumulating wealth by all possible means—moral or immoral, purchasing a zamindari and passing the rest of life in luxury and ease.

In the absence of capital and talent, the rural society of Bengal remained uncared for, and began to rot. This process was further accelerated by the inevitable social consequences of the British mercantilism and the avarice of the landed bourgeoisie. The rich became richer and the poor poorer, while majority of both the classes had been unscrupulous and led an utterly immoral life—whether in towns or villages. Consequently, the cause of religion suffered immensely; a number of Hindu religious sects, which had emerged earlier, very soon degenerated and became a veritable beargarden of intrigue, corruption and vices.

In this background, there had been several Hindu religious movements during 1800 to 1850 to bring purity and stability in society, while the Christian missionaries thought of converting the whole community in Bengal to their faith. However, Raja Rammohun Roy and his followers and the original members of the Dharma Sabha attempted to create a new and vigorous social and economic outlook and tried to recast the Hindu religious system in Bengal in its pristine glory. This dissertation is an analytical account and a historical appraisal of the activities of different Hindu religious sects, the Christian missionaries, and those of Raja Rammohun Roy and his followers in Bengal* in the first half of the nineteenth century.

This work has been divided into five broad chapters.

5. Ibid. pp. 36-39.

* Throughout this work Bengal meant the geographical boundary of Bengal marked by ecological, ethnological and cultural affinities.

The activities of the Vaiṣṇava movement have been discussed in the first chapter, and those of its subjects in the second. In the third chapter is described the manner in which the śāstric and purāṇic deities were worshipped, and the social and economic condition of the devotees. The fourth chapter is devoted to the history of Christianity in Bengal and its social and economic consequences, while the activities of Raja Rammohun Roy and the Brahmo movement form the subject matter of the last chapter.

Several books have been written on the history of religious movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Bengal. *Religious Movements in Modern Bengal* by B. G. Roy (Calcutta, 1965) supplies scanty information about different religious sects. He has not studied how far the society was influenced by these different religious sects. Similar drawbacks are to be noticed in H. H. Wilson's *The religious Sects of the Hindus* (London, 1865) written about hundred years ago. *The Modern Religious Movements in India* by J. N. Farquhar, first published in 1914, is an excellent short sketch of different religions of India upto the first decade of this century, but it suffers from its inherent defect of being a short sketch of a subject so vast and varied. Dr K. K. Datta in his *Survey of Economic and Social Condition in the Eighteenth Century* (1707—1813) has devoted only one chapter on the religious sects of Bengal, which is neither exhaustive nor covers the period of my study. Nevertheless, all these studies stimulate interest in a scholar to delve deep into the subject to find out the historical lessons pertaining to society and economy of the community afforded by these religious movements in Bengal during 1800 to 1850.

This work is based mainly on old Bengali sources. For the purpose of collecting materials for my study I had to tour extensively many parts of West Bengal. I collected materials on Vaiṣṇavism and its sub-sects from Santipur, Khardah and Bagbazar (Calcutta) by interrogating the leaders of these religious communities and going through their family papers and collections. I also visited some villages of Nadia district inhabited by the earliest converts to Christianity in Bengal, and found documents concerning the earliest activities of Christian Missionaries preserved in a village church in Nadia district. All these materials have been profitably utilised in this work.

Some technical words and mythological names have been marked diacritically.

VAISNAVISM

Vaiṣṇavism is a very popular religion not only in Bengal but all over India.* The worshippers of Vishnu are called Vaiṣṇavas. Krishna and Rāma are said to be the incarnations of Vishnu. The Vaiṣṇavas worship either Rāma or Krishna. But the Vaiṣṇavism which is prevalent in Bengal today is different from the original form of Vaiṣṇavism. Originally the worship of Rāma and Krishna was according to vedic-rites and was full of rituals. But with the advent of Chaitanya, the Vaiṣṇava religion became simpler in form and the various rituals were mostly dispensed with; devotional-prayers became more popular than mere performing of rituals.

The modern form of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism had its origin in the preachings of Chaitanya. Viṣwambhar, as Chaitanya was known in his boyhood, was the tenth child of Jagannath Misra, a *vaidik* (versed in the sacred writings of the Vedas) Brahmin of Navadvip. He was born in the month of *Phālgun* in 1407¹ (corresponding to 1486 A. D.). He became proficient in Sanskrit grammar and *Nyāya Shāstra* at a very tender age and before fifteen he was considered as one of the best scholars of Navadvip.² After that he undertook a scholastic tour of East-Bengal, holding disputations at

1. Ghose, S. K. *Amiya Nimai Charit*, Vol. I, p. 1.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

*Vaiṣṇavism was preached by Rāmānuja in Madras in the eleventh century A. D., by Rāmānanda in North-India in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and by Kabir in Upper India in the fifteenth century A. D.

many places. His fame as a Sanskrit scholar became established. At the age of twenty-one, he went to Gaya to perform the *śrādh* ceremony of his father. There he met Īśwar Puri³, a mendicant. From that time onwards his scholastic pursuits turned into religious devotion; he accepted Īśwar Puri as his preceptor and devoted himself wholeheartedly to the service of Krishna.

But the mere meeting with Īśwar Puri was not sufficient to change his ideas. The social condition was also responsible for it. Navadwip was then the main seat of Sanskrit learning in Bengal.⁴ This learning was always confined to a small section of the population viz., the high-caste people, especially the Brahmins. Only the Brahmins read the Vedas and the Upanishads and persons of other castes were not permitted to do so. The low-caste people worshipped minor-gods like Vāsuli*, Mangalchandī, Olāichandī and Satyanārāyan in the hope of getting material relief.⁵ Tantricism with all its vile practices was prevalent in the society. Religious cultivation for the sake of spiritual uplift was not known to them. Their abject misery and spiritual backwardness formed the basis of large-scale conversion to Islam which came with an appeal of universal brotherhood and equality of all men. This was new to the people and so they were greatly attracted to it.

At this critical juncture, Chaitanya appeared with his all-embracing religion of Vaiṣṇavism. He propounded that Krishna was the only object of worship.⁶ If a creature adores Krishna and serves his guru he is released from

3. *Sri Chaitanya Bhagbata*, (Adi Khanda) pp. 264-266.

4. *Sri Chaitanya Bhagbata*, p. 23.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25.

* Vāsuli—a village goddess, Mangalchandī—a form of goddess Sakti, Olāichandī—goddess of Cholera, Satyanārāyan—god of happiness and prosperity.

6. *Ibid.*, (Madhyakhaṇḍa), pp. 317-319.

the snares of illusion and attains salvation at the feet of Krishna. According to Chaitanya, this worship consisted in love and devotion for Krishna. He thought that the ecstasy produced by the devotional songs would help people to realise the presence of Krishna. So he introduced the chorus mode of singing, with the help of cymbals which was known as *kīrtana*. The influence of *kīrtana* was really astonishing. Even the Kazi of Nadia, who had been long opposed to Chaitanya, was impressed by *kīrtana* and removed all restrictions against it.⁷

Chaitanya welcomed all men to perform this form of worship irrespective of their caste or creed. He embraced the untouchables and the Muslims as well.⁸ He accepted many qualified non-Brahmins even of the untouchable caste, who later on were taken into the ministry of his congregation. The religious equality offered by Chaitanya induced numerous low-caste Hindus of Bengal to remain a Hindu, who would otherwise have accepted Islam.

During the time of Chaitanya, the Hindu society was much repressed by the injunctions of the Shāstras, which were dry and difficult to follow. Chaitanya tried to relieve them from the trammels of vedic rituals. So he enunciated a simple mode of conducting marriages and other social and religious functions.*

Chaitanya also asked the Vaiṣṇava community to abjure from the worship of numerous gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. The cultivation of the love of god through

7. Ghose, S. K., op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 87-89.

8. Sen, D. C. "Influence of Chaitanya on Bengali Society and Literature", *Modern Review*, 1907, Vol. II.

*The marriage rules, according to Chaitanya consisted in exchanging garlands of *Tulsi* beads, which had a great similarity with the *gandharba-bibāha* of ancient times, in which age and caste were no bar, only the consent of two parties was necessary.

the service of man and realisation of the existence of god in every human being formed the real essence of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal. This was a new social outlook because Chaitanya gave new humanistic interpretation and approach to the traditional Vaiṣṇava cult.

The Vaiṣṇava community of Bengal, during the time of Chaitanya became divided into two groups. One group was obedient to the laws of Chaitanya and came to be known as *Chaitanya-anugata-Vaiṣṇava*.⁹ The other group strictly adhered to the Brahmanical rules and they came to be known as *Smṛiti-anugata-Vaiṣṇavas*.¹⁰ The former because of their liberalising ideas of caste was treated by the latter as out-caste Vaiṣṇavas, while the latter (small in number) maintained their position in the Hindu society as caste Vaiṣṇavas. They did not appreciate the reforms of Chaitanya and wanted that the Hindu society should maintain its integrity based on tradition and śāstras. So, after the death of Chaitanya in 1533, they tried to assert their supremacy over the *Chaitanya-anugata-Vaiṣṇavas*. Consequently, there followed the revival of the Brahmanical culture and the caste-Vaiṣṇavas gave prominence to vedic rituals.* The *Smṛiti-anugata-Vaiṣṇavas* because of their orthodoxy could not earn as much popularity as the *Chaitanya-anugata Vaiṣṇavas* did. They were able to extend their influence over a limited sections of society, mostly among the wealthy and educated section of people in Bengal. In course of time, their rigidity was much resented by a greater section of the people.¹¹ As a result of this,

9. Pal, B.C. *Bengal Vaisnavism*, P. 94.

10. Ibid.

11. Haq, E. *Vange Sufi Prabhab.*, p. 182.

* This group was headed by Smarta Raghunandan, who through his '*Astabinsati Tattwa*' introduced many rules to revive the old position of the Hindu society.

the caste-Vaiṣṇavas and the followers of Chaitanya were treated as two different lines of Vaiṣṇavism.

The Chaitanya-anugata-Vaiṣṇavas because of their liberalism drew many followers in their fold. Due to contact with different religious beliefs, it naturally assimilated some of their influences. Under different religious preachers, it gave birth to different sects like, *Neda-Nedi*, *Darbes'*, *Sakhībhāva*, *Spaṣṭadāyakas*,* in the sixteenth century, and *Bāul*, *Kartābhajā* and *Sāin* in the seventeenth century. These offshoots of Vaiṣṇavism completely defied the shastric Vaiṣṇavism, as they opposed idolatry and caste-distinction

* *Neda-Nedi*—The origin of this group can be traced to the Buddhist mendicants, who were loosely grouped together for religious purposes.

Virbhadrā, the son of Nityananda initiated them into Vaiṣṇavism. Since that time, they came to be known as "Virbhadrā's neda". In the mela, held in Khardaha, they are still seen in large numbers.

Darbes'—It is an offshoot of Vaiṣṇavism. The followers of this group are very much influenced by Islam. Muslim influence is evident in their songs also. They are said to follow the Bāuls with respect to sensual modes of worship. They are similar also in dress and their aversion for the use of images. Instead of wooden necklace, they use bead, coral and glass.

Sakhībhāva—This sect is another ramification of those which adopt Krishna and Rādhā for the objects of their worship. They take the female garb and adopt not only the dress and ornaments but the manners and occupations of women. This sect, at a time was popular among the upper caste people of Calcutta, but now they are very little seen.

Spaṣṭadāyakas—The sect is described to have been founded by one Rupram Kavirāj. The Vaiṣṇavas of this sect did not admit the divinity of the guru and its male and female

followers lived together in the same *math* or monastery as brothers and sisters. They do not observe caste-distinction. They put shorter *tilaks* than that used by other Vaiṣṇavas and use a single string of *tulsi*-beads.

Sāin—They are supposed to be a branch of Darbesh. They observe no caste-distinction, take wine and beef and accept food from persons belonging to any caste. Regarding social usage, they are totally unconventional of the Hindus. Some of the Chaitanya-anugata-Vaiṣṇavas began to worship Krishna through the medium of their preceptor. This group also came to be known as Vaiṣṇava and the system of their worship became known as *gurvād*.* Thus the Bengal Vaiṣṇavism branched off into various sub-sects and their influence over the society was so overwhelming that shastric Vaiṣṇavism almost lost its hold over the people.

The shastric Vaiṣṇavas passed their life in intellectual pursuits. Some of them absorbed themselves in the meditation of Krishna and led a saintly life. Their calm and serene life, their deep regard for celibacy indicate the influence of Vedic culture. It is said that these people comprised the *Gaudiya* Vaiṣṇava group of Bengal. These Vaiṣṇavas are seen in Vrindāban. In Bengal, they are seen mainly in Navadwip.¹² Another very old centre is in Baranagar, which is known as Pathbari Ashrama. This āshrama has a library, containing books on Vaiṣṇavism and a museum also. Besides these, there are some other Vaiṣṇava centres, which are known as *Gaudiya-maths*.

Chaitanya did never try to organize any *sampradāya* (sect); so he did not lay down any rules for his followers. But after him, one of his followers, Gopal Bhatta prescribed

* A separate chapter has been prepared on *gurvād*.

12. Kennedy, M.T. *The Chaitanya Movement*. pp. 181 & 209.

an elaborate scheme of devotional acts for the less enlightened devotees. These acts characterised the Vaiṣṇava movement.

The first thing that was required of a Vaiṣṇava was *mantradīkshā* or initiation for the purpose of receiving the proper devotional formula of the sect from the qualified guru or preceptor.¹³ For inculcating devotion (*bhakti*) to Krishna which was regarded as the highest object of worship, a worthy preceptor was of great importance. The preceptor was to be learned, should have purity of mind and skill in conducting the work of worship and preferably be a householder. A Brahmin preceptor who could impart the mantras to all castes was highly desirable. In his absence, worthy people of *kshatriya* and *vaishya* castes could also act as preceptor. For selecting the disciple, his character, lineage, physical beauty, attitude of deep reverence should be judged.¹⁴ For initiation, careful choice of the proper day, month and planetary influence was essential. On the day of initiation, the guru worshipped his own guru and various deities and consecrated his disciple and purified his body by *bhutasiddhi*,* *nyasa*† and *mantras*. Then he dedicated his disciple to Krishna, placed sectarian marks on his forehead and garlanded him and whispered the mantras thrice in his ears. After this, the preceptor offered to him the *mahaprasāda*. (food offered to Krishna). Worshipping Krishna was his daily duty. The devotee had to worship his guru first because the śāstras ordain that the worship of a guru should precede that of the gods. The Vaiṣṇavas generally worshipped *śālagrāma* stone and in some families the image

13. De, S. K. *The Early History of Vaisnava Movement in Bengal*, p. 342.

14. Ibid.

* Bhutasiddhi—Purification of the elements of the body by means of mantras.

† Nyasa—a kind of religious exercise with a prayer.

of Radhā-Krishna was also worshipped.¹⁵ The *ekādashī* (the fast enjoined on the eleventh day of lunar fortnight) was to be observed by all, without distinction of caste and sex. The Vaiṣṇavas were asked not to touch meat and fish. During the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) they used to observe the Ramnavami and Doljatra. Ramkeli, near Maldah was a place where the Vaiṣṇavas gathered to observe the Doljatra.¹⁶ During *Vaisākh* (April-May) various devotional acts known as *Kesava-brata* was prescribed, such as bathing twice in a river, living on *habisya*, (to take boiled rice with ghee once a day) practising continence, lying on bare ground, worship of Vishnu and Lakshmi. In *Bhādra* (August-September) *Krishna-Janmāṣṭami* or the birth day festival of Krishna was celebrated.¹⁷ The *melās* formed another characteristic of the Vaiṣṇava movement.¹⁸ In Navadwip a *melā* is held in the month of *māgh* (January-February). It continues for twelve days, when the Vaiṣṇavas perform *Kīrtans* for days and night. It is known as Gopināther *melā*. Another *melā* is held in the month of *Phālguna* (February-March) in Navadwip on the occasion of Chaitanya's birthday. It is attended by several thousand people. Another famous *melā* takes place in the village of Kendubilwa (Birbhum district) on the occasion of the birth day of poet Jaydeva. These Vaiṣṇava-*melās* are technically known as *vat*.

Another characteristic feature of Vaiṣṇava movement was the presence of innumerable temples and shrines all over India.¹⁹ After the death of Chaitanya, he was considered by his followers to be an incarnation of Krishna. So the image of Chaitanya began to be worshipped. Navadwip, being the birth place of Chaitanya became the famous

15. Ibid., pp. 345-346.

16. Mitra, A., op.cit., p.3.

17. Ibid., p.354.

18. Dutta, A. K. op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 298-299.

19. Kennedy, M, T. op. cit., pp. 180-182.

Vaiṣṇava-centre. In one of the temples of Navadwip there is a wooden statue of Gauranga made out of a *nim*-tree. In front of this image *samkīrtana* is held daily. Another very popular shrine for the Vaiṣṇava women is that of Sachi Devi and Vishnupriya, mother and wife of Chaitanya. Images of both of them are worshipped there. In Dacca, there are many Vaiṣṇava temples. In one of these temples, there are five life-size statues of Chaitanya, Adwaita, Nityananda, Gadadhar and Srivasa which are worshipped. Kheturi in the Rajshahi district was another famous Vaiṣṇava centre.

The Vaiṣṇava movement of Chaitanya was characterised by a remarkable outburst of literary activity.²⁰ Many biographies of Chaitanya were composed. Among them, Vrindābana Das wrote *Chaitanya Bhāgavata*. Krishnadas Kaviraj wrote *Chaitanya Charitāmṛita*, which is regarded as the most authentic book on Chaitanya's life. Jayananda also composed *Chaitanya Mangala*. Many historical works were also composed which were almost biographical in nature. Among these works, *Premvilāsa* was composed by Nityananda. D. C. Sen has remarked that though *Premvilāsa* was written in verse, it was 'prosaic in its spirit and in its style.'²¹ Jadunandan Das wrote *Karnanānda* at the same time. *Haribhaktivilāsa* by Gopal Bhatta was supposed to be the most authentic book regarding the rituals of the cult. *Chaitanya Chandrodāya* was written in Sanskrit by Kavi Karnapura. It was known to be the best drama composed on the life of Chaitanya. But the greatest part of Vaiṣṇava literature falls under the head of religious lyrics or hymns. This portion of Vaiṣṇava literature is considered to be the chief contribution of the sect to literature. In it, we find

20. De, S. K. op. cit., p. 433.

21. Extract from 'The Vaiṣṇava Literature of Medieval Bengal' cited in *The Chaitanya Movement* by M. T. Kennedy, p. 133.

numerous poems dealing with different aspects of Krishna's life, his love-making with gopinis, Radha's longing to meet Krishna, etc. This vast body of literature, developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, enriched the Sanskrit literature. It also helped to cultivate the *bhakti* cult more deeply than ever.

During the nineteenth century, Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism was preached and practised mainly by two sets of people. One set of people renounced their family and led the life of an ascetic. They tried to impress the people by their strict celibacy. The other set comprised householders who glorified the faith through their literature. In the first group mention may be made of Krishnadas Babaji, Chaitanya Das Babaji, Choyandhari Babaji, Ramdas Misra, Dayal Das Babaji and Sri Krishna Sinha. Krishna Das Babaji renounced his home and paternal property at Jessore and began to worship Krishna at Vrindaban. He lived on Madhukari (charity).^{*} His life was completely detached from worldly-affairs and in later life he was named as 'Ranbaribaba'.²²

Sri Chaitanyadas Babaji born in a Vaiṣṇava-Kāyastha family of Mymensingh in 1767 passed his life in glorifying the name of Krishna. His forefathers assigned a few acres of rentfree lands for the worship of Krishna. He used to dress himself like a woman.²³

Another ascetic of the period was Sri Choyandhari Babaji, who maintained strict celibacy throughout his life. He neither touched gold nor begged anything and avoided all contacts with women. It is said that he never slept and passed the whole day and night in worshipping Krishna.²⁴

22. Das, H. *Sri Sri Gaudiya Vaisnavajiban*, Vol. II, p. 19.

* 'Madhukar means bee. Madhukari means the system of begging alms by people which is compared to collecting honey by the bees.

23. Ibid., p. 84.

24. Ibid., p. 96.

Sri Krishnasundar Roy, better known as Roy Prabhu held a high post in the estate of Kakina. But soon he was attracted to the ideals of Vaiṣṇava-saints and became convinced of the transitoriness of human life. He turned a mendicant and was so much indifferent to worldly affairs that he did not shed tears at the death of his only son. He had a number of disciples and passed his time in singing hymns. It is also said that he had some supernatural power to cure disease.²⁵

Pandit Ramdas Misra, a Dravida Brahmin came to Navadwip to read the Nyāya Shāstra. But soon he was attracted to the teachings of Chaitanya and he went away to Vrindāban. The Maharaja of Navadwip being much impressed with his scholarship donated six bighas of land to him free of rent. These lands were later utilised as the site for the Vrindāban-akhrās.²⁶

Another saint Dayal Das Babaji was famous for his asceticism in Vrindāban. He used to put on *Kaupin* (Loin cloth) and old rag, never talked with others and sat motionless for hours together.²⁷

The most renowned of these Vaiṣṇava saints was Sri Krishna Sinha, better known as Lala Babu. He inherited a huge property.²⁸ He was also well-versed in the Shāstras. Lala Babu who in his early life led a life of luxury later on began to live on *madhukari* like other Vaiṣṇava saints. He constructed a magnificent palace in Puri and also erected a guest house, where the blind and the crippled could take shelter.²⁹

It is, however, not true that only ascetic people followed this way of life. We have reference to Atul Chandra

25. Ibid., p. 27.

26. Ibid., p. 134.

27. Ibid., p. 136.

27. Ibid., p. 136.

28. Moreno, W. H. B. "The Life of Lala Babu", *Bengal Past and Present*, December, 1926, p. 99.

29. Benerjee, B. N. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 124.

Champati, who was a great scholar and was influenced by Vaiṣṇava way of life.³⁰ There were many other saintly persons, who preached and professed faith in Krishna and led a simple life. These people renounced all connections with their families and carried on their religious life in solitude. They formed the first section of *Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava* group of Bengal. The other group comprised of Vaiṣṇava householders who cultivated religion through literature and tried to revive the literary trend of the early Vaiṣṇava poets. Among them, mention should be made of Chandi Prasad Niyogi, Kamalakanta Das, Nimananda Das, Raghunandan Goswami, Kirshnakamal, Goswami, Gobinda Adhikari, Raghunath Das, Haru Thakur, Ram Vasu and Dasarathi Roy.

Chandi Prasad composed in 1813 an original work under the caption of '*Harināmāmṛta Rasa*'. The poet was the minister or chief officer of the Zemindar of Manhana of Rangpur district.³¹ The importance of his poetical composition lies in the fact that it was absolutely non-sectarian in character. In the first half of the nineteenth century, there was no love lost amongst the worshippers of Vishnu, Siva and Kali. Chandi Prasad, however, sounded a different note and talked of the assimilation of Śāktaism, Saivism and Vaiṣṇavism. He also tried to synthesise these religious cults with yoga-philosophy.³² Nārada is represented here as paying a visit to Mahādeva at Kailash with a view to receiving initiation from Him. (Mahādeva) Siva revealed to him the Harinām-mantra consisting of sixteen names and thirty-two letters. On receiving the initiation, Nārada saw the mantra illuminating his Idā, Pingalā and *susumnā nāḍis*,*

30. Das, H. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 272.

31. Niyogi, C. P. *Harinamamrita Rasa* (Intro.), p. 4.

32. Ibid., p. 5.

* These are arteries, (nāḍis) which are indispensable for the passing of the energy. Susumna is situated within the backbone and Idā and Pingalā are situated on the right and left side of the backbone respectively. The system of Sāṭchakrabheda has been discussed in the section (b) of chapter. III.

and his *satchakra* blossoming forth like a full-born lotus.³³ This illustrates the influence of yoga on the Bhakti cult. After his initiation, Narada made salutation to Parvati (the wife of Siva) and chanted a hymn. Towards the end of the book, the poet describes how *Trideva* (Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar, collectively known as Trideva) had a view of the image of *Chamunda*, a form of Kali.³⁴ The book does not possess much poetic excellence but from the standpoint of religious history of Bengal in the first quarter of the nineteenth century it is important.

Kamalakanta Das, a resident of the village of Siur, sixteen miles west of Katwa, was a poet of no mean order. Many of his poems are included in '*Sri Padakalpataru*','* Kamalakanta composed poems both in *Vrajabhāṣā* and in old colloquial Bengali. These poems describe the event of Krishna's birth at Mathura.³⁵ In another poem, the poet states the worries and anxieties of Yasoda at the childish pranks of Krishna.³⁶ She rebukes Krishna who shows the whole universe within his mouth. The mother feels astonished and looks amazed at her child. Thus, these poems deal with the different phases of Krishna's life. In *Srikrishnavilās*,* the poet gives an account of the life of Krishna at Vrindaban in graceful verses.³⁷

Another anthologist of the period was Nimananda Das, whose one hundred forty-six poems find place in the *Padara-*

*It is a collection of Vaiṣṇava-poems, edited by S. C. Roy and published by Vangiya Sahitya Parishad.

*Dr B. B. Mazumder has discovered the book which was in possession of Haridas Kirtaniya of Radhakunda (district Mathura).

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., p. 31.

35. Roy, S. C. (Ed.) *Sri Sri Padakalpataru*, p. 7.

36. Ibid., p. 24.

37. *Srikrishnavilās*

śasār. Some of these are sung even to-day by *Kīrtaniyās* (those who sing kirtans). In one of these poems, 'Rās-līlā', he describes how the *gopinīs* (milkmaids, who always played with Krishna and longed for his love) on hearing the sound of the flute of Krishna tried to run away from their homes, but their husbands kept them tied down. In grief, they gave up their mortal bodies so that they could have union with their beloved on the bank of the Yamuna in the next life.³⁸ The poet is highly impressed by the device which was adopted by the *gopinīs* to meet *Gobinda* (another name of Krishna). From historical point of view, *Padarasasār* is an important work, as it illustrates the continuity of the flow of devotional lyrics which originated in the days of Chaitanya and had not yet dried up even in the nineteenth century.

The most illustrious of the Vaiṣṇava poets of the period is Raghunandan Goswami. He distinguished himself by his deep study of the Shāstras and literature as also by his highly felicitous style in poetic composition. He was born in 1786 A. D. at the village Maro in the district of Burdwan. The most famous of his works, *Rāmrasāyan* was composed in 1831. It seems somewhat surprising that an orthodox-Vaiṣṇava, belonging to the family of Nityananda, should write an elaborate work on Ram. It begins with a homage to Chaitanya.³⁹ After giving a description of the *yajna* (sacrificial rites) of king Dasarath and the birth of his sons,⁴⁰ he depicts vividly the childhood and education of Ram.⁴¹ He describes the Durgapujā which was performed by Ram strictly according the Vedic-rites.⁴² Thus the

38. Das, N. (Ed.), *Padarasasar*, p. 15.

39. Goswami, R. N. *Ramrasayan*, p. 1.

40. Ibid., p. 12.

41. Ibid., p. 26.

42. Ibid., p. 792,

poet followed the tradition of attempting a synthesis between the cults of Ram and Krishna.*

The biggest work of Raghunandan is his *Gauranga Champu*, written in Sanskrit, in thirty-five cantos, called *asvād*. It does not deal with the ascetic life of Chaitanya and consequently, we don't find any reference to the pilgrimage of Chaitanya or the numerous devotees who gathered round him at Puri. The subject-matter of the book is his *Nabadwip-līlā*.⁴³ The poet does not describe Chaitanya as a mere human-being, he is considered as the incarnation of Krishna, who is God Himself. The poem ends not with the departure of Gauranga to Katwa for initiation into the life of a hermit but with the description of erotic-dalliance of Gauranga with Vishnupriya.⁴⁴ It shows that Raghunandan was unwilling to accept the story of the departure of Gauranga from Navadwip. As Krishna declared that he would not make even a single step outside Vrindaban on any occasion, so also, a belief arose among the Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal in the nineteenth century, if not earlier, that Gauranga lived forever at Navadwip and his greatest manifestation took place at Navadwip and not at Puri, or elsewhere. From this standpoint, *Gauranga Champu* is a landmark in the evolution of Chaitanya cult.

Another great creative poet and *jātrāwālā* of this period was Krishnakamal Goswami, who attained eminence as a writer of *Krishna-jātrā* (open stage-play on the life of Krishna). He was born in an orthodox family of Bhajan-ghat in the district of Nadia.⁴⁵ He used to recite and

*The Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal did not entertain any feeling of hostility towards the Ram cult. Murari Gupta, a biographer of Chaitanya was a worshipper of Ram.

43. Goswami, R. N. *Ramāyan*, p. 1.

44. Ibid., p. 205.

45. Goswami, K. K. *Krishnakamal Gitikvāya*, Vol. I, p. 33.

explain the *Bhāgavata Gītā* in Calcutta but some of the merchants became so enchanted with his explanatory talks on Vaiṣṇavism that they persuaded him to go to East Bengal to preach Vaiṣṇava cult. One of the earliest of *jātrā-plays* is *Swapna-vilās*. The background of the play is that sometime after the departure of Krishna from Vrindaban to Mathura Yasoda, the foster-mother of Krishna saw a dream, that Krishna had come back and was asking for butter as he did in his childhood.⁴⁶ Nanda, the husband of Yasoda and Subal and Sridam, the friends of Krishna tried to ascertain whether Krishna had really returned. Krishna Kamal shows his poetic ingenuity in the query of Sridam as to the reason why Krishna had left Vrindaban. He imagines that Krishna felt aggrieved at being treated as an equal by the cowherd boys. Sridam recalled with regret how he had taken Krishna on his shoulder and also ridden on the shoulders of Krishna. He had slapped Krishna and had also given him the desired food. These words illustrate how friendly the boys of Vrindaban were with Krishna. Such reminiscences heightened their pangs of separation intensely. Radhika too had seen in a dream that Krishna had come back and was entreating her with folded hands for pardoning him for leaving her.⁴⁷ But when she woke up, she found the true state of affairs and became all the more disconsolate. While bemoaning for Krishna, she said that Krishna who was the beloved of many was neither a householder nor the monopoly of the *gopinīs*, but when her fortunate days would come he would come to Vrindaban of his own accord.

Krishna Kamal made it clear that Vaiṣṇava lyrics as well as his own drama drew their inspiration from the life of Chaitanya. Radha's pang of separation is depicted on the model of Chaitanya's intensity of grief and pining for the love of Krishna.

46. Goswami, K. K. *Swapna-vilās*, pp. 20—30.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 30—40.

The Krishna-jātrā was also popularised by other jātrā-wālā like Govinda Adhikari. Born in the village of Jangipoda in Hooghly, Govinda possessed an inborn quality for composing *jātrās* and songs.⁴⁸ His 'Krishna jātrā' in three volumes depict in sweet and elegant language the love and affection of Yasoda for Krishna. He made an attempt to reform dramas by excluding vulgar elements and by introducing innumerable songs.⁴⁹ His 'Krishna-jātrā' consisting of several dramas describes events and emotions through songs. He probably thought that songs had a greater appeal to the masses than ordinary prose. Krishna Kamal and Gobinda Adhikari were great forces in popularising Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal in the nineteenth century.

The Kabiwālās, who flourished during the first half of the nineteenth century popularised Krishna-*līlā* through their songs, but some of them may be rightly accused of vulgarising the idyllic love. One of the earliest Kabiwālās was Raghunath Das who flourished towards the end of the eighteenth century.* He had great influence on Haru Thakur, (1739—1812) who lived in the period of our survey. The poet, Iswar Chandra Gupta (editor of the *Samvād-Prabhākar*) records that in his early-age, Haru Thakur used to get his poems corrected by Raghunath Das.⁵⁰ Raghunath is believed to have been a resident of Chinsurah. He tried to introduce some original ideas, for example, when Krishna pining at the grief of separation one day fell into a swoon, the lady friends of Radha hurried to inform *Chandrābalī* (one of the lady friends of *Rādhā*)

48. Guha Thakurta, P. *The Bengali Drama*, p. 14.

49. Adhikary, G. *Krishna-jātrā*, Vol. III, p. 18, 321 & 322.

50. *Samvād Prabhākar* of August 16, 1854 quoted by Bhabatosh Dutta in his *Kabijībānī*, pp. 127—128.

*The exact date of his birth is not known.

who was a rival of *Rādhā* for Krishna.⁵¹ This is a fine idea because the rivalry could prevail only when the common object of their love was at Vrindaban. However, when he had gone away, probably forever, the common grief of separation became a bond of union between *Rādhā* and *Chandrāvalī*.

Again in another poem, Raghunath describes how the *gopinīs* in their intense grief of separation hear the sounds of the flute of Krishna and ask Radha whether she had kept Krishna hidden in her bower. The sound of the flute was actually heard long ago but it made such a deep impression on the minds that they could hear its reverberations even then.⁵² In another poem, the poet identifies *Kubja* (a hunchbacked woman, who used to supply garlands and dresses in the palace of Kansa, the King of Mathura) with *Sūrpanakhā* (sister of Ravana). As *Surpanakhā* yearned for the love of Ram but could not get it, so in the next birth, she was born as *Kubjā* and got the love of Krishna, even though she happened to be a hunchbacked woman. This indicates progressive outlook on the part of the poet who lived in the early nineteenth century.

Haru Thakur (1739—1812) who holds a high position amongst the Kabiwālās of the period vulgarises Krishna-līlā probably with a view to attracting cheap popularity. The *sakhīs* (female friend) of *Rādhā*, according to him, one day went to the garden house of *Chandrāvalī* and on coming back reported to Radha that they found Krishna and *Chandrāvalī* locked in one another's embrace.⁵³ Such descriptions are not found in the genuine Vaiṣṇava-lyrics.

Ram Vasu (1786—1828) also followed the trend of

51. Pal, P. C. *Prachin Kabiwālār Gān*, p. 10.

52. Ibid., p. 12.

53. Ibid., p. 90.

catering to the low-taste of the audience, who gathered to hear his Kabi-songs. In a song, Radha requests Krishna not to forget her. She likes everything which are black in colour, (as Krishna is black) for which she is laughed at by others. She says that she had nothing of her own except a heart full of love for Krishna.⁵⁴ In another poem, Radha's intensity of love for Krishna is revealed. In describing the first love or *pūrva-rāg* of Radha, he relates how she asked her lady-friends not to disturb the Yamuna on which the reflection of Krishna standing on the *Kadamba* tree on the bank of the river had fallen.⁵⁵ She was immensely enjoying the beauty of Krishna when her friends tried to disturb the calmness of the water by their swimming exercises. She refused to accompany them home and requested them to tell her people in the household that she had been drowned in the *Shyāmsāgar*, which literally means the blue-ocean. (Figuratively, it means that she has drowned herself in the thoughts of Krishna.)

The Anglo-Indian Kabiwālā, named Antony Feringee wrote a fine poem on the affection of Yasoda for child Krishna, who insisted on going to the pastures with his friends for tending the cows.⁵⁶ The mother feels aggrieved that her son like his friends begs food from others at the pasture. This Anglo-Indian Kabiwālā showed much greater sense of restraint than many of the indigenous Kabiwālās of the time.

From the last quarter of the eighteenth century, *pamchāli* songs (Bengali doggerel poems) became very much popular among all sections of people. The theme of these songs were generally some religious or contemporary events. The best *pamchāli* songs were composed by Dasarathi Roy. He seems to have been born in 1806 A. D. The

54. Ibid., p. 176.

55. Ibid., pp. 179—181.

56. Ibid., p. 289.

tuppā songs (short and light song) were very much popular at that time, but Dasarathi introduced a new kind of literary entertainment.⁵⁷ He used to speak on the stage on some portions of the Rāmāyana composed in *payār** and *tripadī* metre and having alliterations at the end, but he did not ask for the use of *chāmar* or flybrush, which was customary at such functions. This new kind of *tuppā* became very much popular among the peasants. His popularity spread rapidly and he was called to the court of Raja Rajkrishna of Kasimbazar⁵⁸ (Murshidabad district).

Dasarathi was not a Vaiṣṇava by culture or heritage but he gave a new orientation to Vaiṣṇavism through his songs. In the poem, 'Vaiṣṇava', he states that Gouranga had appeared in the *Kaliyuga* (iron-age) to rescue the human-being whom he asked to renounce everything and utter the Harinām.⁵⁹ The poet demands devotion and sincerity from the people who have forsaken meditation and indulge in common feasting. In another poem, he strongly denounces the hypocrisy of the Vaiṣṇavas who had turned into *nedā-nedīs*.⁶⁰ These people were devotees of Vishnu but were strongly antagonistic to the name of Kali. This narrowness of mind agitated him and the poet calls for the true spirit of a Vaiṣṇava. The religious antagonism between Śāktas and Vaiṣṇavas was a very common feature of the day and Dasarathi tried to reconcile the conflicts of the two sects by stating that the two different religious views

57. Chakraborty, H. *Dāsarathi O Tauhar Pāmchālī*, p. 89.

58. Ibid., p. 107.

* *Payār*—Bengali measure of verse consisting of two lines each containing fourteen metres.

Tripadī—A kind of Bengali metre.

59. Ibid., p. 422.

60. Ibid., p. 423.

emerged out of the one, who is Himself shapeless and omnipotent. So all men were equal in His eyes.

In another poem, the poet depicts that Krishna is sometimes frolicsome in the relation with the gopīs.⁶¹ He very attentively listens to the lamentations and asked them to come to the Yamuna for taking bath. Here he is a bit vulgar in his tone; perhaps it is employed to cater for the popular taste. His poetic exuberance is clearly manifested in the description of Krishna. The absence of Krishna made Rādhā impatient because she was waiting for Him the whole night. She addressed Him as 'Purna-Brahma', who can satisfy all her desires and can save the world from danger. Here we see that Dasarathi not only depicted Krishna as the beloved of Rādhā but ennobled Him with all qualities as the creator of the universe.

Dasarathi wrote many *Pāmchālīs* on the life of Krishna at Vrindaban and he has taken considerable liberty in explaining it in entirely new fashion. For example, in describing the *gostha līlā*, (Krishna's sports at the pasture field) Dasarathi says that one day when the boys went to call Krishna to accompany them to the grazing field, Yasoda did not allow them to awaken Krishna as he had no sleep at night.⁶² Sridam, one of the friends of Krishna, then dressed up like Krishna and went to the field along with the cattle. But the cows seemed to have discovered the trick and refused to take grass in the absence of Krishna.⁶³ Such a situation has never been described in any of the lyrical songs. One day, Yasoda engaged a preceptor for teaching Krishna. He, therefore, did not go to the grazing

61. Mukherjee, H. (Ed) *Dāsu-Rāyer Pāmchālī*, pp. 83 & 123.

62. Chakraborty, N. *Unābīnsa Satābdīr Pāmchālīkār O Vāṅglā Sāhitya*, pp. 215—219.

63. Ibid., p. 220.

field. His companions complained to Nanda, who came forward to ask for an explanation from Yasoda. She replied that she did not want Krishna to be an illiterate-fool. At this, Nanda flared up and said that a cowherd could not be a fool because he deceives the whole world by diluting the milk. Dasarathi tried to portray the life and works of Krishna as a simple unsophisticated villager would have done and through his songs he carried the common-love for Krishna to almost every household in Bengal. His Pāṁchālī made a great appeal not only to the Common people but to the Vaiṣṇava scholars too.

Guruvād

Guruvād, a familiar term in Hindu religion, means the worship of guru as God. It is a very old belief in Hinduism that a medium is necessary to reach the adored God. We find the earliest mention of Guruvād in the Tantra.¹ It originated in the Tantra and was developed by the Buddhist Sahajiyās, who in their *Charyāpadas* and other compositions speak highly of the indispensibility of the services of a guru.²

Guruvād is not a sect by itself, it is a popular aspect of Hindu religion and its popularity is proved by the fact that Guruvād finds its place in S'aivism, S'aktivism, Vaiṣṇavism and among the Bauls.³ The Sufis also considered 'Murshid' or Guru as indispensable.⁴

The word 'guru' literally means a preceptor ; one who

1. Agamvagish, Krishnananda, *Tantrasāra*, pp.6-7.

2. Das Gupta, S. B. op. cit, pp 102-103.

3. The point has been discussed in different sections of Chapter III.

4. Ibid p. 194.

guides the religious and spiritual life of his disciples. The term Guruvād signifies the process of cultivating and meditating God, but this process is different from the other process of worship in the Hindu religion. It holds that guru is the medium through which God can be reached, therefore guru is to be worshipped. Regarding the guru *Upāsana* (worship) two views are prevalent. One is that God is the only object of worship and the worship of guru is not necessary. Another view is that without guru's help no worship of God is possible. The latter view is more popular and is widely prevalent in Bengal.

The Shāstric Guruvād enjoins some qualifications for a guru. A guru should be well versed in the Vedas,⁵ so that he may remove the religious and other doubts of his disciples. He should be in possession of the knowledge of Brahma through extra sensual power and should possess the tranquility of mind.⁶ The man who strictly follows the injunction of the Shāstras pertaining to himself is the only fit person to become a guru. A person who falls from the standard of life laid down by the Shāstras cannot be a guru. Not only that, the guru of a householder must himself be a householder, the guru of a *Sanyāsī* should be a *Sanyāsī* himself. * The *Tantrasāra* prescribes that the S'aiva disciple must be initiated by a S'aiva guru and so also is the case

5. "Guruvād", *Birbhumī*, Baisākh, 1334 B. S.

6. Ibid.

* There are numerous examples, however, of householders taking their initiation from *Sanyāsī* preceptor, e.g., Madhavendra Puri was the guru of Iswar Puri from whom Chaitanya took his initiation when he was a householder. Two other disciples of Madhavendrapuri, Adwaita and Pundarik Vidyanidhi were householders. In the nineteenth century, Rammohan Roy took his initiation from Haiharananda Tirthaswami, a *Sanyāsī*.

with the Śāktas.⁷ The guru must be a Brahmin by caste and his family should be a traditional cultivator of the Shāstras.⁸

But this restriction regarding the caste of the guru was liberalised because of the influence of Chaitanya. Now non-Brahmins could also become guru. Narahari Sarkar, a Vaidya by caste, initiated a number of Brahmins and his descendants now continue to be spiritual preceptors of the higher castes including Brahmins.⁹ Even now, non-Brahmin householders play the role of a guru in the *Vaidya*-community.* The Hindu Shāstras have prescribed that adoption of a guru is essential for the realisation of Brahma (that is ultimate reality). Since, without him, realisation of Brahma is impossible, a disciple should consider his guru to be infallible and like Brahmā himself.¹⁰ This was the Shāstric conception of Guruvād and, therefore, it was accepted by all the sects.

The adoption of guru in the different branches of Hinduism, although a matter of formality, is of great importance. The guru serves as a link between a worshipper and God. Guru leads his disciple through his own experience.¹¹ Though guruvād formed an important part in the religious practices of different sects of the Hindu religion, it assumed a special prominence in Bengal. The reason

7. Extract from Tantrasāra quoted in the *S'abdakalpadruma* by R. K. Dev, p. 260.

8. Das, H. *Sri Sri Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava Avidhāna*, p. 50

9. Ghose, B, *Paschim Vanga Sanskriti*, pp. 290-291

10. 'Guruvād', *Dāsī*, March, 1897, pp. 149-152.

* In the latter half of the nineteenth century, one Narottom Thakur, a Kayastha of Rajshahi district gave initiation to Ganga Narain Chakraborty, a Brahmin by caste

11. "Guru" *Udbodhan*, Phalgun, 1309 B S

why it did not attain so much importance in other sects is that the Śāktas and Śaivas used to follow the rules regarding the guru laid down in the Tantrasāra, but as these rules were very rigid, it was not possible for the common people to practise them. Moreover, the element of *bhakti* (devotion) was not so prominent there. So the guru remained a part of religious observances among them and he did not gain as much prominence as in Vaiṣṇavism.

Another reason was that the Śākta and Śaiva householders of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century came more or less from the well-to-do section of the society; their number was small as compared to the vast number of people who gathered round Chaitanya. The advent of the Muslims had threatened the conversion to Islam of a large section of the society* and to check this conversion, Chaitanya thought it prudent to bring them within the fold of Vaiṣṇavism. He infused in them the element *bhakti* (devotion) with the aim of inculcating in them the love of Krishna. These people living together gradually developed in themselves a particular type of Upāsana and religious idea, centring round Guru. In course of time, they formed a sect within a sect which also had been named by William Hunter as Vaiṣṇavas.¹² Guruvād assumed a prominent role among these Vaiṣṇavas.

Chaitanya himself had no mind to put them under a Guru for their religious practices as he had very little faith and admiration for the system. But after the death of Chaitanya, the idea of popularising the faith gradually gained ground. There developed two main centres of the faith, one in Khardaha under Nityananda, another in

* For details on this point see *Vanger Jātiya Itihāsa* by N N Vasu, Brāhmaṇa Kanda, Part VI, pp 69-70, 164-165.

12. Hunter, W. A., *Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. 5. p.85.

Shantipur under Adwaita.¹³ Both of them were close associates of Chaitanya. Nityananda was very liberal in his outlook and he began to initiate people irrespective of caste considerations. He is said to have initiated 1200 *Nedas* and 1300 *Nedis* in Khardaha*.¹⁴ The *Subarna-baniks* who were considered a low caste community were warmly accepted by Nityananda. Uddharan Dutta, the most opulent man of Saptagram became the supporter and organiser of the faith.¹⁵ Thus Nityananda was held in high esteem especially by the low-caste people. But as he discarded the Shāstric ideas, he was greatly looked down upon by the Brahmin *Pundits*. His converts came from different parts of Bengal. They came from Panihati, Saptagram, Nimta, Kumarhatta, Chotrabhoga, Agarpara and Bara Nagar.¹⁶ The Conch traders of Dacca also received initiation at his hands.¹⁷

Adwaita, however, held different ideas. He did not appreciate the liberality of Nityananda. His view was that disciples must be chosen only from the Brahmin caste, otherwise the group would become a heterogenous immoral group. Although this was the general rule and most of the disciples were Brahmins, yet in special cases non-Brahmins were also accepted by Adwaita. His wife, Sita Debi, herself initiated Nandini,¹⁸ (real name was Nandarani) a Brahmin

13. Ibid, Vol. I, 65.

S 14. Den, D. C. "Khardaha", *Vangabānī*, Kārtik, 1329 B. S.

* Short note is given in Chapter III section (c).

15. Banerjee, A. K. *Vāṅglā Sāhityer Itibritwa*, Vol. II, p. 220.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid. p. 485.

18. Majumdar, B. B. *Sri Chaitanya Chariter Upādān*, p. 457.

and Jangoli (real name was Jageswar) a Kāyastha.¹⁹ They used to dress themselves as women and worshipped Krishna as Sakhās*. In 1809, Hamilton Buchanan found the followers of Nandini in Purnea and Malda districts respectively.²⁰

Besides Nityananda and Adwaita, there were some other gurus also, such as the gurus of Baghnagara (in Burdwan) and Srikhanda²¹ (in Burdwan). The Baghnagara Goswami sowed their origin from one Vamsivadan Chatterjee.*²² This family was distinguished for its scholarship. The Srikhanda Goswamis were Vaidya by caste, but they had a considerable number of Brahmin disciples. Besides, there were some other Goswamis in Orissa and Sylhet. It was among these Goswamis that spiritual teachers of the Vaiṣṇavas were found. The movement developed through these families acting as Gurus. In course of time, several other gurufamilies originated but almost all of them followed either the principles of Adwaita or those of Nityananda.

At first, the movement was not an organised one. People of different castes organised themselves in a group after embracing Vaiṣṇavism. They considered guru to be the medium of worshipping God and therefore started worshipping him. Besides the guru and the homeless

19. Ibid, p. 460.

* They are supposed to belong to the Sakhibhāva group.

20. Ibid.

21. Kennedy, M. T. op. cit., pp. 151—152; Ghose, B. Paschim Vanga etc. p. 322 & 287.

22. Ibid., 64.

* Vamsivadan was an attendant of Chaitanya. After the death of Chaitanya, Vamsivadan took up the duty of preaching the faith, and came to Baghnagara by the middle of the sixteenth century. There he initiated many persons.

mendicants there were the *grihasthas* (householders). After initiation to Vaiṣṇavism these *grihasthas*, who were of different castes, practised many of the old Hindu rituals. Chaitanya extended his religious preachings even to the Muslims, but we do not find any mention of a Muslim mendicant during the early period.

The *Vairāgi* or Vaiṣṇava mendicants were more in number as compared to the *grihasthas*. *Vairāgi* means one who has renounced the mundane world. The *Vairāgis* thus constituted the ascetic order of this sect and this order was recruited from the lowest section of the society, generally from the *Hāri*, *Dom*, and *Sunri*.²³ Wherever the Goswami (Guru) went, he recruited a large number of followers. We find mention of a Goswami in Raj Nagar in Dacca, who recruited a large number of followers.²⁴ Along with the *Vairāgis*, lived the *Vairāginis*, who were forsaken women of low order, and generally lived with *Mahants* (abbot) as their concubines. But it should be noted, that all of them did not take this path willingly. The rigidity of the Hindu Society sometimes forced them to take this course.²⁵ There is a story of a young widow who being enticed by a *Vairāgi* was compelled to adopt such a life.²⁶ The number of

23. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. V, p. 55.

24. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 55.

* Rammohun Roy in his Bengali tract 'Pathya—Pradān' mentioned that the higher classes of the society were generally Śāktas, whereas Vaiṣṇavism happened to be the religion of lower castes, like, weavers, potters, goldsmith, *kaivartas* (fishermen) and *sunri* (wine distillers and seller). See Banerjee, B. N. and Das S. K. (Ed.), *Bengali Works*, No. 6, p. 179.

25. Sarker, J. M. Ibid.

26. Extract from 'Bengal Peasant Life' by Lalbebari Dey quoted in 'The Chaitanya Movement' by M. T. Kennedy—p. 71.

female mendicants was greater than that of the males. The male ascetics were known as *Bābājis* and the females were known as *Mātājis*. Some of the female ascetics were well-versed in Sanskrit and sometimes they served as the tutors of the ladies in wealthy families.²⁷

This group of men and women who did not have a good social background left their regular occupations and begged from door to door for subsistence. They wandered about preaching the name of *Hari* by means of *Sankīrtan* (glorification of Krishna in sacred songs). The use of *Sankīrtan* for popularising the message "is regarded as the unique contribution of Chaitanya to the spiritual life of modern Bengal."²⁸ These Vaiṣṇavas were not an organised body. They did not follow any standard code of conduct or rules of observing their faith. They never preached idol worship nor admitted any caste rules. They were scattered all over Bengal but in Nadia district, their number was the highest.²⁹ Hunter mentions that only in the Bakurgunj district there were fifty to sixty thousand *Vairāgis*.³⁰

Several formalities characterised this movement. The first of these was the ceremony of initiation and the other was the method of *Upāsana*. With regard to the homeless mendicants, however, the rules of initiation were somewhat different. They were admitted into the sect only after taking *bhek* or initiatory rites.³¹ Another distinguishing

27. Basu, A. (Ed.) *Reports of W. Adam*, p. 189.

28. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 55;
Kennedy, M. T. op. cit., pp. 204—205.

29. Garrett, J. H. E. *Bengal District Gazetteers*, (Nadia), p. 51.

* Hunter stated that only in Nadia and Jessore districts 393, 917 males and 427, 115 females were loosely grouped together for religious purposes.

30. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. V, p. 55.

31. Kennedy, M. T. op. cit., p. 162.

feature of this sect was the *Ākhrā-life*.³² The *Ākhrā* was the meeting place for their religious-cultivation. Generally it was a big thatched house with extensive courtyard with *Tulsi* plants on a pulpit in the open. There were as many as fifty *ākhrās* at Navadwip and Puri. In Calcutta three *ākhrās* were well-known. Bara-*ākhrā*, where the greatest gathering used to be held, the Tetultallah *ākhrā* and Baldev *ākhrā*.³³ These *ākhrās* were governed by the Mahants and supported from the gifts of the Sunri and the Subarnabanik castes.

The ceremony of initiation was a simple affair. After worshipping Chaitanya, the guru gave to the disciple, who had to observe fast from the previous day, a *dori* (string), a *Kaupin* (loin cloth) and a Tulsi-bead and painted *Tilak* on his forehead.³⁴ He then took a garland in his hand, offered it first to the image of Krishna and then put it in the neck of the disciple secretly whispering into his ears a *mantra* (portion of sacred text) which was generally a monosyllabic word. For performing this function, the guru was generally given a fee of rupee one and four annas. The disciple then bowed down before his guru who used to give a *Karanga* (a kind of water pot) of cocoanut shell to him for collecting alms.³⁵ The initiation ceremony was completed with a grand feast in the name of Nityananda and Adwaita, in which all the Vaiṣṇavas assembled participated.³⁶ The qualification for a disciple was not at all

32. Ibid. pp. 174—175 :

Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 57

33. Ibid.

34. Dutta, A. K. *Bhāratbarsīya Upāsak Sampradāya*, Vol. I, p. 162.

35. Risley, H. H. *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. II. p. 341 ; "Vaiṣṇava Sampradāyer Vivaran", *Satyārṇava*, January, 1854, pp. 61—63.

36. Dutta, A. K. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 163.

rigid. The person desirous of being initiated as a disciple had to remain a *Sebāit* (worshipper) under his guru for a certain period during which he had to observe celibacy. If the guru was impressed with his purity of character and devotion of mind, he used to initiate him. There existed a teacher who taught relationship between the guru and his disciple. The guru read the *Shāstras* and pointed out to him the religious path to be followed.

The guru not only influenced him spiritually but guided his personal life too. In the beginning, Krishna was their tutelary deity of worship. Besides Krishna they adored the image of Jagannath.³⁷ They disregarded other idols. Some of them worshipped Chaitanya as Krishna, Nityananda as Balaram and Adwaita as S'iva. The images or pictures of several other followers of Chaitanya, such as Rup Goswami, Sanaton, Srijiya, and Das Raghunath* received adoration as gurus.³⁸ They were worshipped especially on the *Janmā-stami* day and were offered rice, vegetables, sweets, curds and sugar.³⁹ In many places of Bengal, the puja was performed both in the morning and the evening, but it is curious to note that no Brahmin was employed for carrying on the work of the priest. The most distinctive thing among them was the *Nagar-Sankīrtan* or singing in procession. It was very popular among the Vaiṣṇavas and every Vaiṣṇava took part in it. Some other ceremonials developed with the worship of Krishna. In the beginning, great stress

37. Kennedy, M. T. op. cit., p. 9.

* After Chaitanya, Rup, Sanaton, Srijiya, Das Raghunath along with Raghunath Bhatta and Gopal Bhatta were entrusted with the duty of preaching the religion in Vrindaban. These six were popularly known as Sada Goswamis of Vrindaban.

38. Risley, H. H. op. cit., Vol., II, p. 342.

39. Ibid.

was laid on *Bhakti* but in course of time, the ceremonial aspect became much more prominent. The principal festival of Vaiṣṇavas in Bengal were *Dola-jātrā*, *Rāsa-jātrā*, *Rādhāstami*, and *Rātha-jātrā*. The *Dola-jātrā* was usually celebrated on the full moon day in the month of Phālgun (February—March). The Chief feature of this festival was the swinging of the image of Krishna and the sprinkling of *āvira* (red powder which the Hindus sprinkle during holi) on the image. This day was a great day for the Vaiṣṇavas as Chaitanya was born on this very day. The *Jhulan Jātrā* was observed in the month of *Srāvana* (July—August). Here also the images of Radha and Krishna were made to swing. This festival was generally observed in the evening. The swinging festival of Krishnagar lasted for three days and was frequented by twenty thousand people.⁴⁰ *Janmastami* was celebrated as the birth day of Krishna in the dark fortnight of the month of *Bhādra*.⁴¹ (August-Sept) *Rādhāstami* was celebrated as the birthday of Rādhā, also in the month of *Bhādra*. The *Rās-jātrā* was a very popular festival of the Vaiṣṇavas. It was observed to celebrate the occasion of Krishna's dance with *gopinīs* (female friends of Krishna). The *Rās jātrā* of Nadia was very famous and about twenty-five thousand people used to visit it.⁴² The *Rāsotsava* of Khardaha and Panihati were very well-known.⁴³ The *Ratha jātrā* was observed with great festivity at Mahesh near Serampore and Dhamrai near Dacca. The *Ratha Jātrā* of Calcutta had a unique grandeur. It had the patronage of the Seths

40. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. V, p. 55.

41. Seth, H. *Prāchin Kalikata Parichāyā*, p. 231.

42. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. V, p. 55; Navadwiper *Rāsotsaver Itibrittwa*

43. Dutta, P. K. "Kalikātār Itibrittwa", *Navyabhārat*, *Agrahāyan*, 1310 B. S. p. 411.

of Govindapur.⁴⁴ These festivals served as a meeting place of the Vaiṣṇavas. As said earlier, Krishna and Chaitanya were worshipped as God by the Vaiṣṇavas. The images of these Gods were generally installed by the rich votaries of Vaiṣṇavism and around these images generally *melās* were held. Dewan Kirti Chandra Dutta, a *Subarnabanik* by caste, who had dedicated a good portion of his property to the cause of his tutelary-deity, established *Shālgrām*, near Jangipore (Murshidabad district) which became known as *Vrindābanabihārī*.⁴⁵ A fair called *Tulsivihāra* was annually held there.

The *melās* (fairs) and *Mahotsavas* (grand feast) were inseparable parts of the religious observances of the Vaiṣṇavas.⁴⁶ The mahotsava was a great feast of the Vaiṣṇavas of all branches, generally held on the occasion of the initiation ceremony or on the death of a *Vairāgi*. The householders sometimes donated liberally for public feeding at the time of the *Mahotsava*. The Vaiṣṇava *melā* was an assemblage of *Vairāgis* and *Vairāginīs*, where they danced and sang in praise of Gopinath and took the name of Radha and Krishna. Vaiṣṇava-melās are still held at Navadwip, Kheturi, Baghnapura, Panihati and Agradwip.⁴⁷

The marriage ceremony of the Vaiṣṇavas was simple but peculiar.⁴⁸ The standard Hindu-rituals were not observed. In the midst of *Sankīrtan*, which went on continually, the bride and the bridegroom exchanged their *Kanthi* (necklace of beads) which was technically known as *Kanthibadal*. This was the most essential part of their marriage. These Vaiṣṇavas generally believed in

44. Ibid.

45. Dutta, A. K. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 298.

46. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 55.

47. Ibid.

48. Risley, H. H. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 341.

child marriages⁴⁹, but in many cases, they departed from it. Widows could marry again and divorce on both sides was permitted. The Vaiṣṇavas had a peculiar idea that after death they should be buried by a Vaiṣṇava. This belief persuaded the female ascetics to marry at an old age. They were buried in a sitting posture, but no *Srāddha* (religious rites performed after death) ceremony was performed, only worship of Chaitanya was performed.

The history of guruvād in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was not of much importance, except that the number of its followers increased. At first, the families of the Lahas, the Mullicks, the Mitras of Kumartali and the family of Navakrishna Dev Bahadur⁵⁰ were initiated, but later on, the Bose and Pal family of Bagbazar, the Duttas of Nimtallah⁵¹ also accepted this faith. Thus the number of grihastha Vaiṣṇavas increased and with them Calcutta became an important centre of guruvād.

But in the first half of the nineteenth century, guruvād became greatly debased. The spiritual value of the movement greatly waned; it became largely materialistic. Formerly the guru was the wisest and the most learned person in the group and was the head of the *ākhrā*, but after sometime, guruship became hereditary and became confined to one family. The son of a goswami must be a goswami even if he was licentious. The guru cared very little for the spiritual uplift of the *Shiṣya* (disciple) which was usually enjoined as the most noble task of the preceptor. He initiated a large number of disciples not with a view to imparting them religious teachings but only to extract money, which served to meet his family

49. Ibid.

50. From the Statement of Krishnadev Bhattacharjee, a well-known guru of the Bagbazar locality, (Bagbazar, Calcutta. Age 54).

51. Ibid.

expenses. Many of the temples previously donated by the Zamindars were used by them as their personal property. Even the Shantipur goswamis, who used to recruit only Brahmins relaxed this restriction for pecuniary benefits.⁵²

Although the disciples were taken from all castes, the gurus did not give equal treatment to them. At the time of recruitment, the gurus personally gave *mantras* to disciples who were Brahmins, Kāyasthas or Upper caste Hindus. When the disciples were of low caste, the guru's deputy was sent in place of the guru to perform the initiation ceremony.⁵³ Not only that, the *mantra* given to a Brahmin was not the same which was given to a non-Brahmin.⁵⁴ This was particularly prevalent among the followers of Nityananda.

Formerly, the number of the disciples was small and the guru kept a close relationship with them, but during the period under review, the number of disciples increased enormously. It therefore became difficult for the guru to keep contact personally with all his disciples. So, for governing the Vaiṣṇava Church, Bengal was divided into several circles.⁵⁵ Every circle was directly under the supervision of the goswami, who kept an *Adhikārī*, for collecting fees and initiating disciples. Under him was the *faujdār*,* whose business was to keep an eye on the activities of the proselytes. Under him was the *Charidār*, whose duty was to carry out the order of the

52. From the statement of Bisweswar Goswami, a guru of the Shantipur locality, (Shantipur, Nadia. Age 67).

53. From the statement of Krishnadev Bhattacharjee, Bagbazar, Calcutta. Age 54.

54. Ibid.

55. Loc. cit., *Satyārṇava*, January, 1854, pp. 61-62.

* Unlike Government *faujdārs*, they were appointed only for religious-purposes.

faujdār.⁵⁶ These men were extremely wicked and for carrying out their master's order they could do the meanest things. Thus the guru lost direct touch with his disciples and he appeared before the people as a fearful extractor of money. It is said that the extraction of money by a goswami was attended with more oppression than the collection of revenue by the Government.⁵⁷ Thus the real spirit of religion was lost and the relation between the preceptor and the disciple was reduced to a mercenary one. The perversity was also manifest in his character. Serious allegations were made against the goswamis by Kaliprasanna Sinha, a writer of the time.⁵⁸ He mentions that in the district of Midnapore the system of *guru prasādi* was prevalent. In this system, a newly married girl had first to offer herself to the guru. It was considered as a part of religious observances and had been termed as the 'amorous sports' of Krishna. In pursuance of the system the fifteen year old girl of Rameswar Chakraborty of Betalpur was sent to the guru dressed as Radha.⁵⁹ The bridegroom, when he learnt of it, went to the guru, beat him mercilessly and drove him away. Perversity also crept into their religious observances. The gurus formerly worshipped only the idol of Krishna, but in the period under review, they had begun observing *Durgapuja* and *Dewali* (*Kalipuja* festival) in the night of the *Kalipuja*.⁶⁰

The rigidity of the caste system against which this movement was directed again became prominent. The gurus did not like to take food cooked or touched by non-Brahmins.⁶¹ They also started taking animal food. All these caused a

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Sinha, K. P. *Hutom Panchār Nakshā*, Vol. II, p. 48.

59. Ibid.

60. Risley, H. H. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 343.

61. Ibid.

steady decline of their profession, and they liked to merge with the greater body of the Hindu Society. Many of them left their hereditary profession of guruship and took up service under the Government or engaged in trade.⁶²

Guruvād, however, did not die completely. It shifted from villages to the towns and became fashionable among the intellectual section of the cities.*

Its social significance :

The Guruvād, as we see in Vaiṣṇavism, had failed to offer any kind of spiritual or moral leadership to the community. So the religion which attracted a vast portion of population in Bengal during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, is very little accepted now-a-days. At present, the sect as a whole, is held in a very low esteem. The degradations in the character of the guru and the disciples are greatly criticised. Moreover, this movement was bitterly criticised by the Christian missionaries.⁶³ They remarked that the gurus had left their duty of instructing the

62. Garrett, J. H. E. op. cit. (Nadia), p. 50.

* After the establishment of British rule in India, a newly educated middle class came into being, most of them settled in Calcutta and some other towns. Under their patronisation, the gurus increased in number and began drawing disciples from all sections of the society. Therefore, the religion shifted its centres from villages and became localised in towns. The influence of the gurus became so great that reform movement of the Brahmos or the Christian missionaries could very little mould its course. Its extent and magnitude can be gauged from the fact that a personality like Keshab Chandra Sen too fell a victim to it. (Please see *Acharya Keshab Chandra* by Gour Gobinda Roy, Vol. I, pp. 450—452)

63. *Calcutta Christian Observer*, March, 1834, p. 116.

disciples, their religious observances aimed at extracting money from others. "They are as wolves among sheep"⁶⁴ It consequently caused a great set back in its progress. The group living together has inspired profligacy and immorality and thus has weakened the basis of the religion. The religion, in its opposition to caste and formal observances is a progressive force but in its advocacy of meditation and celibacy of the group it was quite reactionary. The census of 1872 showed the number of Vaiṣṇavas in 24 Parganas at 36,563⁶⁵ and in Dacca at 11,886.⁶⁶

(c) KARTĀBHAJĀ

By the first half of the eighteenth century, a new Sub-Sect of Vaiṣṇavism made its appearance in Bengal. It was known by the name of Kartābhajā, or one who worshipped one's own preceptor. The origin of this sect is not exactly known, but Aulchand is considered to be the first preceptor and founder of the sect. This sect, though an offshoot of Vaiṣṇavism borrowed much from Islamic faith and that is why Aulchand's disciples are also known as the Auliyās, probably after the Auliyā sect of the Sufīs.

After the death of Chaitanya, his followers tried to preach their master's religion all over Bengal.* They

64. Ibid.

65. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 67.

66. Ibid, Vol. V, p. 56.

* After the death of Chaitanya, his followers began preaching the faith all over India. Adwaita and Nityananda were entrusted with the duty of preaching in Bengal.

succeeded in attracting large number of Buddhists to their fold. It is said that Nityananda and his son Virbhadrā succeeded in converting twelve hundred *Bhiksus* and thirteen hundred *Bhiksuni's* (Buddhist mendicant) to Vaiṣṇavism.¹ Buddhism at that time had completely decayed and with its decline the 'Mathas' (Monastery) and 'Vihāras' also disintegrated.

The *Buddhist Bhiksus* and *Bhiksuni's*, who had lost their shelter, had come under the complete influence of Tantricism and had adopted its vile practices.² They developed certain social and religious habits peculiar to their own. They were looked down upon by others, and lived in utter seclusion. The all-embracing religion of Chaitanya offered them a much needed refuge.

The Kartābhajā sect started with some basic ideals of Vaiṣṇavism, but it gradually absorbed the ideals of other religions. The early career of Aulchand, the founder of the sect, is shrouded in obscurity.³

It is said that at the age of eight he was abandoned in the betel garden of Mahadevi Barui* of Ula in Nadia, who picked him up and reared him. When Aulchand reached the age of twenty, he went out on travel and visited many places of India. There he came in contact with a number of *Yogīs* and *Fakirs*.⁴ He himself became a saint and renounced worldly things. He began to dress like a Muslim Fakir, used a Kaupin, a tattered coat, and a quilt made of rags.⁵ He began to preach

1. Sen, D. C. "Ghospārā-Kartābhajā Dol", *Bangabāni*, Jaistha 1329 B. S.

2. Kennedy, M. T. op. cit., pp. 11—12.

3. Hunter, W. W. *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. I, p. 73.

4. Ibid., p. 74.

5. Ibid.

equality of all men and observed no caste distinction.⁶

Brahmin and *Chandāl*, male and female all were equally treated by him. Members of all castes sat together and participated in the community feast. This highly liberal principle perhaps made the sect very popular among the depressed section of the community who were oppressed by the Brahmins, and saved the society from dis-integration. They defied idolatry. But they never decried any religion or ritual. They had high regard for the Hindu *pūjas* and ceremonies; but, they themselves as a sect, never observed any rituals.⁷ The main tenet of Aulchand was, "Speak the truth and worship one God." What he perceived in life, he called it truth.⁸ This truth was the guiding force of his religion. Because of its emphasis on truth the religion was also named as *Satyadharma* or *Sahajdharma*. The emphasis on truth indicates great adherence to naturalism, which was the direct influence of Sahajiyā-cult.* Aulchand fixed certain norms of conduct for his disciples. They were asked to believe⁹ that there was only one God who was incarnate in *Kartā*. They were not to tell a lie and were expected to repeat the *Mantras* thrice a day. They were to regard Friday as a sacred day and the pomegranate tree as a sacred object. They were to abstain from taking meat and other intoxicating drugs. They were not to kill or treat anyone harshly and were prohibited from indulging in adultery. They were to

6. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 84.

* Somewhere it is spelt as Mahadeva Barui.

7. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 74.

8. Garrett, J. H. E. *Bengal District Gazetteers*, (Nadia), p. 48.

* Sahajiyā cult has been discussed in Chapter III-Section (C),

9. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 74—75,

Garrett, J. H. E., op. cit., p. 49.

regard fervid love or *Bhakti* as the only necessary thing for their religious cultivation.

The selection of Friday to be the day of religious discussions also indicates the direct influence of Islamic culture. It is said that Aulchand was the disciple of a Muslim mendicant.

The use of the name 'Kartā' for the name of a preceptor was also borrowed from the Muslims.¹⁰ The Kartābhajās had no special *mantras*. They only uttered, 'Guru dhara, Satya bala.' (Follow the Preceptor, speak the truth). Aulchand considered the existence of a Guru in this sect to be essential.¹¹ He thought that the guru must perform the sacred duty of guiding the disciple. Every Kartā was permitted to observe any kind of ritual he liked, but the man-worshipping element was to be regarded essential. The life and activity of Aulchand excited admiration of all, and it was his teachings that unified together the caste-driven, oppressed and immoral people who had been ousted from the fold of Brahminism. This group had no religious code, no scripture; they only read 'Sri Chaitanya Charitāmrita'.¹² Drinking and eating of flesh was strictly prohibited for them. They never witnessed a sacrifice.¹³ Aulchand had twenty two disciples of whom Ram Saran Pal was the most renowned. He was a *Sadgop* (milkman) by caste but a cultivator by profession.¹⁴ Ram Saran observed the religious tenets of the Kartābhajās as outlined by Aulchand. But from his time, we find a gradual degradation setting

10. Sen, S. 'Kartābhajār Katha O Gān', *Viswabhārati Patrikā*, No. 1, 1358 B. S.

11. Long J. op. cit., p. 345.

12. Sen, S. Loc. cit, *Viswabhārati Patrikā*, 1358 B. S. p. 12 (No. 1).

13. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 54.

14. Garrett, J. H. E. op. cit., (Nadia), p. 47.

in the original religion. During the time of Aul, guruship was a formality only, but the overwhelming influence of Ram Saran made it the most prominent factor of the religion. So, Ram Saran was regarded by many the first Karta or guru of the sect. He began to be regarded as the incarnation of Chaitanya by the Kartābhajas, who professed that as 'Every Hindu worships God in the form of a man, so they worshipped the man who resembled God in qualities.' They maintained that God is not a spirit and they could not believe in a god who is invisible.¹⁵ So the Guru became the visible incarnation of God and the very life and soul of the sect. Belief in the Guru and the chanting of mantras thrice a day was according to them the true means to salvation. Ram Saran exerted such a powerful influence upon his disciples that the Kartā began to be regarded as the universal father of the sect. The influence of the guru was so great that a boy of the sect regarded the guru as his real father. This overwhelming influence of a single personality became a peculiarity of the sect. Ram Saran chose Ghoshpara as his centre of activity. From his time onwards Ghoshpara became the chief centre of the sect. The place turned into a holy place, where the people regularly paid their visits. Ram Saran's career came to an end in 1783.*

After him, the guruship became hereditary. His wife succeeded him for a short time.¹⁶ She was known by the name of 'Sati Mā'. Her son Ramdulal or Dulalchand succeeded her. He was born in 1182 B. S. (1774 A. D.). He was not as famous as his preceptor but succeeded in attracting a large number of adherents in course of a few years.

15. Sen, S. *Amar Jiban*, Vol. 4, p. 131.

* Another view states that he died in 1770.

16. Sen, D. C. "Ghospārār melā" *Bangabānī*, Jaistha, 1329 B. S. pp. 430-31; Garrett, J. B. E. op. cit, Nadia, p. 47.

He was well versed in Sanskrit and Persian.¹⁷ Ram Dulal, alias Dulal, alias Dulalchand composed some religious songs during the period 1823-25. His songs are not easily intelligible to others except his co-religionists. After him, the guruship passed to his two sons Iswar Chandra and Indra Narayan.¹⁸ Both of them flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century and Marshman met Is'warchandra in a village near Calcutta in 1802.¹⁹ Is'warchandra became the most indolent and wicked guru of the sect. During his guruship, degradation became most marked. The original tenets were all lost sight of. Everybody shuddered at the name of Kartābhajā. The vices which they imbibed from the Tāntriks became most prominent during this time. The guru was attributed with some supernatural powers. He could heal incurable diseases and could even give speech to the dumb. The guru gained this power like the Tāntriks through meditation in the company of women. Their observances were kept secret from the common people but even all the Kartābhajās were not allowed to know them. This shows that a privileged order had come into existence in the sect which had been expressly forbidden by its founder. The group life of the Kartābhajās brought many licentiousness which gradually became the order of the sect. Adultery was strictly prohibited by the founder, Aulchand, but it became a common practice of the period under review. Is'warchandra did not try to reform it, rather he encouraged licentiousness and corruption so much that both he and Indra Narayan were imprisoned for their licentiousness.²⁰ The Kartābhajā became a term of ridicule for the other religionists. These social evils became so much pronounced

17. Mullick, K. N. *Nadia Kāhinī*, p. 241.

18. Loc. cit, *Somprokāsh*, 12 Chaitra, 1270 B S

19. Extract from Calcutta Review, 1846, Vol. 6, quoted in *Nadia Kāhinī* by K. N. Mullick, p. 249.

20. Mallick, K. N. op. cit, p. 241.

in the sect that a poem was composed criticising this aspect of the Kartābhajās. Dasarathi Roy, the celebrated singer of the *Pāṃchālī* songs composed a poem which was a bitter satire on the Kartābhajā sect.²¹ It was said that some women suffering from pangs of separation from their lovers had decided that they would join the Kartābhajā sect and put an end to all their miseries, because one who joined the sect got the privilege of making love with others without incurring the displeasure of their guardians. They also said that they would get good feast on every Friday on which special prayers were held. There is also an allusion to the head of sect, playing the part of Krishna, stealing away the clothes of the *Gopinīs* who would be his female disciples. The vulgarities of the sect are well reflected in another song.²² In this song, the Kartā very boldly asserts himself to be the leader of the group which had attracted people of various castes such as *Hari*, *Chandāl*, *Brahmin*, *Vaidya*, *Kāyastha*, etc. He also attracted women of all ages and standards, who abandoning their family joined the sect. This song indicates how much the people at large had become aware of their vices. There was also deviation from religious principles. Though image-worship was forbidden by its founder, the later gurus not only performed *Durgā-pujā* but also observed *Lakshmī-pujā* and the swinging ceremony of Krishna at their houses.²³ Equality of all castes which this sect professed was also later given up. In their social life, the Kartābhajās maintained caste-distinctions. They followed strictly the Hindu *Shāstras* in connection with marriage i.e. marriage outside the caste was strictly forbidden. The relatives of the Palas of Ghoshpara professing this faith, observed all Hindu rituals befit-

21. Mukherjee, H. (Ed.), *Dasu Rāyer Pāṃchālī*, pp. 623—624.

22. Ghose, J. N. (Ed.), *Chaitra Māser song*, p. 24.

23. Hunter, W. W. op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 74.

ting a *Sadgop*, and did not take food from the hands of a *Chandāl*. This divergence between the professed faith and the practice became marked and the Kartā was also conscious of it. This clearly proves that as time went on, this sect failed to keep itself outside the general body of Hindus. In spite of all these vices the movement progressed and drew a large number of adherents. It is true that this sect gained popularity among the low class people, but some wealthy and literate persons also came under its influence. Among them, the name of Babu Jainarain Ghosal of Bhu-Kailash (Kidderpore) might be mentioned.²⁴ Thus the religion got the patronage from a small section of wealthy people also.

No account of this sect would be complete without the description of the annual fair, which was held in Ghoshpara on the occasion of *Dol* (Holi festival) in the month of March or April.²⁵ This fair took place in front of the house of Ram Saran Pal, near a tank. In the fair about fifty thousand people assembled from all parts of Bengal, mostly from Murshidabad district. Men of all ranks, high and low, rich and poor, illiterate and educated, all participated in it.²⁶ The number of females was greater than the males. These females were all housewives but here they acted as harlots. Muslims and Christians also frequented this fair. At the fair, vulgarity and licentiousness which had become a feature of this sect in later years was exhibited. In the *melā*, the Kartā used to sit on a hanging seat surrounded by the young females singing and playing on '*gopījantra*'²⁷ (a kind of musical instrument). This

24. Sen, S, loc. cit. *Viswabhāratī Patrikā*, Srāvan, 1358 B. S., No. 1.

25. Sen, N. C. *Amar Jiban*, Part IV, pp. 130—132.

26. Ibid,

27. J. Long. op. cit., p. 345.

was the 'Lilā-Kshetra' (field of the spirit) of the guru where he like lord Krishna used to play with young girls. At this fair, the Kartā used to receive a large sum of money.²⁸ It was customary for the devotees who flocked at the fair to touch the feet of the guru and give some *pranāmī* (cash as token of their reverence). The *Mahāsayas*,* and the itinerant missionaries (technically known as Uliasher) who were appointed by the Kartā for popularising the sect in different parts of Bengal also used to collect money on his behalf from the devotees, and present it to the Guru at the time of the fair. The poor devotees, who could not afford to pay in cash kept apart a handful of rice every day for the guru. The guru also kept a round size box, containing some bones of Ramsaran Pal and the devotees used to put some *pranāmī* on it also.²⁴ Thus the Kartā received several thousand rupees at the fair and became an opulent man of the locality. The guru exercised a great influence on the devotees. Besides the Kartā, the other places of attraction in the *melā* were the tank called the *Himsāgar*,³⁰ and the pomegranate tree³¹ under which Satīmā was buried. The people took a dip in the tank to wash away their sins or to cure their diseases and deformities. At the pomegranate tree, a large number of persons used to lie prostrate and keep fast for days together. They considered the dust of the place sacred and thought that a mere touch of it would help them in attaining their

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Loc. cit., *Somprokūsh*, Chaitra 12, 1270 B. S., pp. 324-326,

31. Long, J. op. cit., p. 346.

*Mahāsaya—Delegates appointed by the Kartā to collect money from among the lower order of religionists.

objective. Some of the devotees swung their heads as if they were visited by the spirit. In the evening, religious discussion was organised, followed by the chanting of songs in praise of the guru.³² After this, a community feast was held, where the devotees ate together. This *melā* is still held in Ghoshpara. The moral and spiritual degradation of the Kartābhajās reached such a level that they became an object of ridicule for the other sections of people. Their degradation provided opportunity to the Christian missionaries who had come to Bengal to preach the faith. A favourable opportunity was created for them in the third decade of the nineteenth century when Nadia came under the grip of a flood.³³ The Christian missionaries came forward to help the flood-stricken people and relieve their distress. They, by their service to the people, created a good impression on them. Rev. Deer of the Church Missionary Society visited Krishnanagar in 1832 to find out the prospect of Christianity in that district.³⁴ The mission found that the Kartābhajās denied caste system. This similarity between the religious principles of the Kartābhajās and the Gospel attracted their attention and they thought that the work could be successfully carried out among the Kartābhajās. This however was not true as Kartābhajā and Christianity were quite different from each other. The debasement among the Kartābhajā sect must have attracted the attention of the Christian missionaries. Deer and his co-religionists began to hold discussion with the Kartābhajās and preach the Gospel. Deer, when he again visited Krishnanagar in 1835 found that Christianity had created

32. Ghose, B. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 166.

33. "Religious Movement in Krishnanagar", *Friend of India*, April 11, 1839.

34. Ibid.

a favourable impression among the people.³⁵ The younger people had been greatly influenced by the Christian propaganda but the older people resisted its spread. Those who evinced their inclination towards Christianity were socially persecuted. But, in spite of this persecution, fifty five villages of Nadia inhabited by five hundred families came under the direct influence of the Gospel.³⁶ This created a great stir in the society. An attempt was made by some enlightened people, who had come in contact with Brahmoism, Islam and Christianity, to reform the religion of the Kartābhajās. In this process of reform, a new sect known as the *Rāmballavī* sect grew up and its devotees were called *Ballavballavī*.³⁷ So this *Rāmballavī* sect may be regarded as the product of a conscious effort of the educated people of the society to save a great portion of the population from conversion at the hands of the Christian missionaries. The prayer song of the sect clearly reveals the Brahmo and Christian influence on it. It shows the all pervading power of the Brahmos and love for the degraded humanity of the Christians. Many enlightened people came under its influence. Srinath Mukherjee of Bansberia and Krishnakinkar Gunasagar were the main patrons of the sect.³⁸ A report of the *Sambād Prabhākar* tells us that they installed some emblem of *Param Satya* (real truth) on the pulpit in the house of a Pod by caste near Kanchrapara and worshipped it.³⁹ It was followed by a grand feast of five thousand people of different castes. After that, the Christians read the

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Sen, S. loc. cit., *Viswabhāratī Patrika*,
(Sravan-Aswin) 1358 B. S.

38. Ibid.

39. *Sambād Prabhākar* quoted in the above article.

Bible, the Muslim read the Koran and the Brahmin Pandits read the *Gitā*.⁴⁰ Their object was to find out truth in all the religions. It was Kartābhajā in content but Christian in social behaviour. It could not make any headway outside Nadia and some surrounding districts.

Its social significance

The Kartābhajā made its appearance in the religious arena of Bengal with a comparatively liberal and universal outlook of life. The greatest good it could deliver was to offer shelter to the outcastes and low castes, who had no real standing in the society under its wide canopy. It very naturally offered a suitable resistance to the conversion movement of Islam. But it adversely affected the society in other spheres. The common life without any restriction of sex relation vulgarised the real meaning of the movement. Unscrupulous elements availed of the opportunity and degraded the society to a lower depth. Later on, the movement could not maintain its integrity. The Kartās imported mysticism and *mantras* to attract their followers. Their feign promise to cure the incurable disease and of granting sight to the blind and speech to the dumb were among the many new borrowings. Liberal contributions in terms of cash and kind from the disciples were the main source of livelihood of the Kartā. A lady of the *Subarnabanik* family regularly donated for the maintenance of the Kartā.⁴¹ This reduced the movement to a commercial enterprise in the spiritual plane. All the vices of the Brahmanical and Vaiṣṇava religions entered into it. It could no longer be recognised as distinct from other religions except in certain social behaviour.

40. Ibid.

41. Sen, N. C. op. cit., pt. IV, p. 133.

(d) Kishorī-Bhajā

Another new sub-sect of Vaiṣṇavism which appeared in Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century came to be popularly known as Kishorī-Bhajā or Maiden-worshippers. Unlike the other Vaiṣṇava sects, they did not worship Krishna; their object of worship was Rādhā, or for that matter any adolescent girl whom they considered as Rādhā.¹ The followers of the sect were aware that the unequivocal name of their community led them open to the suspicion of sexual immorality, and that was why to divert the curiosity of the people, they placed a book or an article of common use in a conspicuous part of their house and worshipped it as a symbol of their faith.² This sect was supposed to be an offshoot of the Rādhāballavī sect or the Spastadāyaka† sect. But this does not seem to be probable because the latter observed strict moral principles, whereas the Kishorī Bhajās were lax in sexual morals.³ A Spastadāyaka would not look at a woman or take food from her hand while the Kishorī-Bhajā made women the chief object of their worship. The sect was peculiar in having no *udāsin* or mendicant class. The guru or *Pradhān* initiated neophytes and conducted all religious services. The cult was said to be popular, especially with women and with the *Sunri* (wine distillers and

1. Risley, H. H. *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*. Vol. II. pp. 340—342; Kennedy, M. T. op. cit. p. 211.

* Rādhāballavī sect was supposed to have been founded by one Haribansā. The Rādhāballavīs worship Rādhā and Krishna and they think Rādhā to be the source of all energy or the eternal mother of the universe. This sect gained popularity for a very short period.

† Spastadāyakas: please see the Chapter on Vaiṣṇavism.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

sellers) caste. The members were recruited irrespective of caste consideration; Brahmins and *Chandāls* were treated equally. This equality of treatment drew large number of adherents to the sect. The one distinguishing feature of the sect was that it was confined to the householder class only.

In the Kishorī-Bhajā congregation, every young girl was considered to be a Rādhā and every man was thought of as Krishna. They tried to attain the eternal bliss through the help of a young maiden, and imitate everything that was done in Vrindāban. In short, the *Rāsilā* (amorous sports) of Krishna was rehearsed. One of the peculiarities of the sect was that the *mantras* of the sect were innovated by themselves and were not sanctioned by the *Shāstras*. At their congregation, all classes of male and female irrespective of caste gathered together for worship. There the upper caste people had to partake food cooked by the low caste people. The food included fish and *masur dal*, (lentil pulse) which were prohibited for the Vaiṣṇavas. These congregations were performed in the midnight to maintain secrecy about rituals of the sect.

At the initiation ceremony which was open only to members of the sect, the guru whispered the word '*Paramhansa*' (great ascetic) in the ears of the recruits. This was followed by "an indecent scene in which a naked woman sat on the knee of the neophyte".⁴ This was considered as a crucial test of his having mortified the flesh and its lusts, and of his having become a worthy candidate for admission. The peculiarity of the sect was that even the upper caste people were initiated by men of lower caste.⁵ The chief ceremony resembling the *Rāsamandalis* of the Maharajas of Bombay which they had styled 'carnal love meetings' was celebrated

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

in a special room "where a long strip of white cloth is spread on the floor with plantain leaves laden with fish and rice, while flesh and spirits never appear."⁶ This was followed by a community feast. When the feast was over songs in praise of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa were chanted, with the effect of often causing extravagant and violent excitement, terminating in hysterical weeping and immoral excesses. The guru then selected the prettiest girl to be his partner. The pair is dusted with powder of sandal wood and is crowned with flowers. The assembly, then made adoration to them as the personation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Every man present there also decorated himself with garlands and observed perfect silence. He was "presumed to fall into a dreamy sensuous condition, with mind abstracted and absorbed in the contemplation of the semblance of Rādhā at his side"⁷? Some idea of the religious ideas of the sect can also be gathered from their songs. In one of the songs, an effort had been made to impress on the minds of the members of the sect that the worship of maiden brought salvation to the people.⁸ An allusion is made in the poem to Chandi Das's Love for Rāmī*, a washer-woman and *Vilwa mangal*'s*⁺ adoration for *Chintāmani*. It had also been suggested that one should not wander about in search of a suitable Rādhā, but one should consider one's lady love as Rādhā.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. "Kishorī Bhajan", *Birbhumī*. Chaitra, 1334 B. S. song no. 1.

* Chandidas, the great poet of Bengal was in deep love with Rāmī, a washer-woman. He regarded Rāmī to be the guiding spirit of his poetic life.

+ Vilwamangal, a Brahmin of the Deccan, deeply loved Chintāmani, a prostitute. He regarded her to be the inspiration of his life.

In another song, the importance of guru in the religious functions of sect has been *emphasized*.⁹ It has been pointed out that Guru and Kṛṣṇa were identical, and if the Guru was dissatisfied, the observance of any religious ceremony became meaningless. The worship of guru was properly done through the worship of a Kishorī. In this worship, caste distinction was not recognised, and all shastric ceremonies were considered irrelevant. The poem ended with a note that by worshipping guru and Kishorī one would achieve the favour of Lakshmī and Nārāyaṇa.

This sect became popular in East Bengal for a time, because it did not believe in the caste system or the shastras. It gave the most important place to women in their religious worship. Therefore, it attracted the low caste people and the women in large numbers. But soon the licentious and immoral activity of the sect drew the attention of the enlightened and educated men and they began to brand the followers of the sect as antisocial and immoral.¹⁰ At meeting in 1325 B. S. (in 1917) held in the village of Dwipara in Dacca district they vehemently criticised the Kishorī Bhajā sect, and demanded its total extinction, because the performance of rituals in closed door encouraged licentiousness among the people.

(d) Bāuls

The word Bāul has various connotations. Scholars differ regarding the etymology of this word. Some think that the word has been derived from the sanskrit word 'Bātula'

9. Ibid, song no. 2.

10. Ibid.

which means crazy or mad.¹ Some others think that 'Bāul' has been derived from 'Vyākula', meaning eager.² There are however some others, who think that Bāul has come out by suffixing 'lā' to the Bengali word 'bāi', meaning mania. It is generally believed that Bāuls are those people, who renouncing the family and society wander from door to door and sing of the mystic conception of divine love. They want to attain spiritual union by restricting their respiration. But the mere literal meaning would not do. We would have to take into account how this sect came into being. Originally, the Bāul was not a distinct sect but when certain smaller sects joined together, it attained a separate identity. It came out of the amalgamation of the Buddhists, the Tantriks, the Sufis and the Vaiṣṇava-Sahjiyās. When Buddhism became a decaying force in Bengal, Buddhist *Sramans* (Buddhist religious mendicants) came in close contact with the *Tantrika-Sanyāsīs* and adopted their *Yoga Sādhana*⁴, as Tantricism was quite popular in the society then.⁵ The Tantra Sādhana implied the attainment of the highest spiritual bliss with the performance and cultivation of five 'Makars' i.e. *Madya*, *Māṃsa*, *Matsya*, *Mudrā* and *Maithun* (wine, meat, fish, gesture and sexual intercourse). The people professing this faith used to drink wine and meditate the supreme reality. This way of worshipping attracted a large number of adherents. and as time went on, it gradually became more and more vitiated. The Buddhists, when following this type of Sādhana were called Buddhist

1. Das Gupta, S.B. *Obscure Religious Cult.* p. 182.

2. Ibid.

3. Haq, Enamul. *Vange Sufi Prabhāb*, p. 187.

4. Das Gupta, S.B. op. cit., p. 16; Bhattacharjee, H. (Ed), *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. 4, p. 260.

5. Payne, A. *The Sāktas*, p. 46.

Sahajiya.⁶ The word Sahajiya means those who take life and religion in their natural and simple forms. The term is applied to a system of worship and belief in which the natural qualities of the senses should not be suppressed. Naturally, the people who were socially degraded and had no philosophy of life were attracted to this belief, and they indulged freely in the gross vices of the system. It became very popular among the uneducated low class people. This Tantrika influence created a great degradation in morality. With the establishment of Muslim rule, many of them were converted to Islam. Though these converts wore *ākhallāh* (loose garment upto the ankle) like muslim mendicants, they privately carried out the Tantrika practices. These muslims later on became known as Fakirs.⁷ Later, they came in contact with the Sufis of Bengal. Sufi means, a person who has been purified from all worldly defilements.⁸ The Sufis were a monistic and non-idolatrous sect. With their doctrine of mystical union with God, they regarded the world of phenomena as mere reflection of the Supreme Being. Allah is the only object in the Universe with which man's soul will be mingled through spiritual cultivation. It believes that a man can reach God by physical exercise, such as suspending respiration or regulating breath. When a man reaches the highest stage of meditation, he attains 'Fana' (highest spiritual attainment according to the sufis). Every Sufi Sādhaka (devotee) strives to reach that stage. It has much similarity with the Upanishadic ideas that God is Omnipotent and that we can feel His existence in His creation.⁹ The Sufis follow the Koran but they do not

6. Monsuruddin, *Haramani*, p. 12 and p. 20; Chakraborty, J. *Prāchin Bhāratīya Sāhitya O Bāngālīr Uttarādhikār.* p. 199.

7. Bhattacharjee, U.N. *Bāngālār Bāul O Bāul Gān*, p. 51.

8. "Sufidharma", *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, Ashar, 1789 Saka.

9. Haq, Enamul. op. cit., p. 61.

consider it as infallible.¹⁰ Sufism discarded not only the artificial caste distinctions but also the religious-rites. A new entrant is initiated by the Pīr.* It suggests that Sufism also put great stress on guruvād. It entered Bengal by the end of the twelfth century and lost its original character when it came in contact with the Buddhist Sahajiyās. Slowly, it adopted many of the Hindu-practices, especially the esoteric Yoga practice of the Sahajiyās.¹¹ The two different forces very slowly assimilated each other's ideas and became so akin to each other that it became difficult to ascertain their separate identity. S. B. Dasgupta thinks that the Bāul sect was born out of the fusion of the above two trends.¹² But we want to add a little more. The Bāul sect was born out of the fusion of the Buddhist Sahajiyās and Sufis but there was a third element in its birth—the Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyās.

After the death of Chaitanya, in 1533, many subsects of Chaitanyism grew up. They all defied the shastric Vaiṣṇavism and were a class by themselves. Among them we can name the Aul, Sāin, Kartābhajā * etc.¹³ They were known by the name of Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyās. The Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyās were free to admit all classes of people in their sect and that is why we find a number of non-Brahmins among its followers.¹⁴ They secretly cultivated the Yoga-Sādhana with the help of female-devotees. Women played an important role in their spiritual cultivation. According to S. B.

10. Loc. cit., *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, Ashar 1789 B. S.

* Pīrs were the spiritual guides of the Sufis. A detailed study of the pīrs has been made in Ch. III, section (d).

11. Ibid., pp. 18—19.

12. Dasgupta, S. B. op. cit., p. 182.

* For short notes see Ch. II Section (b), and Ch. I.

13. Haq, Enamul. op. cit., p. 182.

14. Dimock, E. *The place of the Hidden Moon*, p. 91.

Dasgupta, the Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyās differed from the Buddhist-Sahajiyās on one point. The Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyās had a distinct note of 'Love'. Love was the guiding spirit of the Sādhana.¹⁵ The Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyās declared that man was the noblest among the creations of God and so they should be loved. They advocated equality of all men, which though preached during the earlier period attained deeper significance now by the addition of Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā element. The Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā Sādhana-became very popular when Chandidas, the great poet accepted Ramī, a washer-woman as his emblem of Ś'akti.¹⁶

Thus the three trends borrowed and reborrowed their ideas from each other and unknowingly assimilated each other. It all happened so slowly that it is difficult to ascertain their individual contribution.

It is generally believed that the Bāul sect came into existence in the Seventeenth Century at Nadia,¹⁷ which had given birth to many of the Sub-sects of Vaiṣṇavism. The historical reason is not far to seek. Chaitanya was born there and his thoughts and teachings which were against caste rigidity and the superiority of the Brahmins greatly revolutionised the society.

A Bāul did not abide by any social or moral injunctions. He generally dressed himself in tattered garments, made up of remnants of clothing previously worn by Muslim *Darbes*¹⁸ (Sufi saint). They used to play an *ektārā*, an one stringed instrument. Hindus and Muslims both were admitted to Bāul sect. The Hindu Bauls followed the

15. Dasgupta, S. B. op. cit., pp. 136—137.

16. Ibid., p. 168.

17. Mullick, K. N. *Nadiā Kāhini*, p. 249.

18. Chakraborty, J. *Prāchin Bhāratiya Sāhitya O Vāṅgālir-Uttarādhikār*, p. 217.

Vaiṣṇava practices.¹⁹ They put *tilaks* (marks of standal paste) on nose and used necklace of coral beads or glass; the hair often rolled up and tied in crest shape on the head. The Muslim Bāuls wore long yellow robe, known as *Alkhāllāh* and had long beards.²⁰

The Bāuls of Bengal were of two sets, *Udāsins* (holding aloof from worldly affairs) and *Grihīs* (householders).²¹ The householders were generally illiterate; they kept no touch with the normal social functions. They begged alms singing songs of '*Prakṛiti Sādhana*' (worship of the female shakti). '*Dandabat*' was their form of salutation. They refused to be guided by any social injunctions. They were averse to fasting or any religious rites and lived in *ākhrās* (Monasteries of Vaiṣṇava monks) with their female companions. There were many such *ākhrās* in Dhalchatra and Dhamrai in Dacca District.²² The *Udāsins* excited a kind of affection and pity because of their emotional nature. Though idol worship was discarded and deprecated by them, many Bāuls later began to worship idol.²³ They begged from all persons indiscriminately but some of them took up professions. The Bāuls of Faridpur and Khulna Districts (now in Bangla Desh) had taken up the profession of cultivating lands and some were carpenters.²⁴ The Bāuls of Narasingdih in Dacca District were businessmen and others were service-holders.²⁵ The Bāuls married Bāul "*bostomis*" (Vaiṣṇava

woman). Age and caste were no bar to them. Nītaī Bāul of Varansi was a married person.²⁶

These *grihī* Bāuls were the most degraded and detestable class of people. They pretended to be mad and while singing they sometimes were in religious fits. There was much difference between their religious functions and social life and therefore to make an adjustment between the two, they sometimes acted as hypocrites. The thing, however, common to both the sections of the Bāuls was that they were very liberal in observance of caste-restrictions. This was the sole reason why the low class people were especially attracted to this sect. They did not make any distinction between the Hindus and the Muslims.

The philosophy and teachings of the Bāuls are abstruse and peculiar. They are based on Naturalism. 'The world is within the body', is the essence of the Bāul philosophy. The heaven, the *golak* (paradise of Viṣṇu) the sun, the moon and everything of the universe reside in the human body.²⁷ Love for the Supreme God (the *Param Devatā*) living in man is the main point of their religious practices and this is attainable through the love of man and woman. The lover and the beloved ultimately realise the *līlā* (amorous sports) of Radha and Krishna. The indulgence in sex relation between the male and female partner is only a ladder to reach that final stage of eternal bliss.²⁸ This sexo-yogic practice to know the 'Man of the Heart' (*maner mānus*) or poetically the unknown bird' (*Achin pākhi*) has a striking similarity with tenets of *Tāntrika-yoga* as well as with that of the *Sahajiyās*. The mode of *Sādhana* is very secret, they never disclose

19. Kennedy, M. T. *Chaitanya Movement*, p. 215.

20. Haq, Enamul. op. cit., p. 187.

21. Ibid.

22. Sen, K. M. *Bānglār Bāul*, p. 47.

23. Dutta, A. K. op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 176—177.

24. Bhattacharjee, U. N. op. cit., p. 57.

25. Ibid.

26. Sen, K. M. op. cit., p. 47.

27. Dutta, A. K. op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 170—172.

28. Kennedy, M. T. op. cit., p. 115;

Dutta, A. K. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 167.

it to others. The whole philosophy is known as 'dehatattwa'.²⁹

Like other sects, the Bāuls also lay great stress on guru.³⁰ The guru guides them to the path of religious attainment and the Bāuls have unflinching faith in him. On every night, of the full moon and of the new moon, they begin their *Yoga Sādhana*, where the guru is invited. Every Bāul is ready to offer his wife as the companion of the guru in the *sādhana* and the woman who is selected as the companion is held in high esteem.³¹ Along with this principle, they also developed some obnoxious practices which were hateful to common people. It is said that the Bāuls preferred the meat of an aborted baby.³² Scholar like Akshay Kumar Dutta has related that the flesh of a dead body and its clothes are very much liked by them.³³ The practice of consuming the four moons* was one of their distinctive features.³⁴ All these horrible and vile practices, bearing the stamp of Tāntricism developed among some of the low class people in the sect and brought bad name to them. People, especially the enlightened ones despised their queer ideas and practices. In some of the villages, amateur dramatic parties were also formed to ridicule them.

29. Ibid.

30. Dasgupta, S. B. op. cit, p. 194 and 197.

31. Ahmad, R. *Bāul Dhansar Fotowah*, p. 114.

32. Ibid., p. 8.

33. Dutta, A. K. op. cit, Vol. I, p. 167.

* The Bāuls think that the four things of human body i. e., blood, urine, stool and semen should not be thrown away, and should be taken back as they constituted the inevitable elements of the body.

34. Ibid., Das Gupta, S. B. op cit, p. 184 ; Ahmad, R. op. cit, p. 3.

From the last quarter of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, there flourished a good number of Bāul *sādhakas* in Bengal, who earned reputation for their purity of heart and love for social service. The most illustrative of them was Lalan Fakir. His family was Hindu, Kayastha by caste† and his actual name was Lalan Chandra Roy.³⁵ He was born in 1774.³⁶ A very interesting story is current about him.³⁷ Once he was left by his relatives at the *burning ghat* (Cremation ground) as they thought him to be dead. A Muslim lady incidentally saw him and brought him to her place. He regained life under her care. His family forshook him as he was long in contact with the Muslims. In utter disgust, he renounced his social life and began his *Sādhana* in the woods of Chowria.³⁸ (in Kusthia district). During that period, the Sufi teachings greatly influenced him and he was initiated to the Bāul faith by Siraj Sai, a *Kāhār* (Palanquin bearer or water carrier) by profession.³⁹ Though Lalan had much faith in his guru he never blindly followed him. He refused to obey his preceptor's command when he felt that it was not convincing and just. In this respect, he was truly a rationalist.

The Bāuls were notorious for their moral laxity and Lalan revolted strongly against it. He thought that contact with a female other than the wife was a great sin.⁴⁰

† Some said that he was of Brahmin origin.

35. Monsuruddin, op. cit, p. 64.

36. Ibid.

* According to another report he was born in 1772.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Josimuddin, "Lalan Fakir", *Vangabāni*, Srāvan, 133 BS, p,

40. Ibid.

All these ideals indicate that Lalan wanted to bring about reform among the Bāuls. Perhaps, this was due to the great reform movement of the nineteenth century. Lalan advised his disciples to be truly religious. He had friendly relations with his neighbours and always helped them by giving free medicine and nursing. Like other Bāuls, he was not illiterate, he composed a book on Ayurvedic medicine, 'Sarkaumudi'.⁴¹

The life of Lalan excited great appreciation from every religious sect. He introduced a novel method of discussing religious theme.⁴² In every *Phālgun* (February-March) he used to assemble some five to seven thousand mendicants at a place where they ate and sang in praise of Allah. The groups came from far and near and held religious discussion there.⁴³ Some of them used to place their points through songs. These songs were known as *pālāgān*, the meetings were named as *Bhāora* or *Sādhusevā* and the religious-discussion as 'Ālek'. Lalan attracted large number of disciples, many of them are still in Pabna and Faridpur districts of East Bengal.⁴⁴

The songs of Lalan Shah have made him immortal. Many of his songs are marked by high spiritual ideas. He warns that man may be attracted to worldly things, but these are mere illusions. Man comes and goes alone. All relations are fake; when life ceases to function, the most near and dear ones abandon us.⁴⁵ In another highly allegorical song, Lalan says that without paying any heed to the advice of the physician, we take bad meal and thus the disease tends

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Monsuruddin "Lalan Shah" *Sāhitya Partrikā*, 1362 B. S. song no. 14.

to increase. He refers in this song to the vacillating human nature. Man generally falls to the temptations of worldly comforts and gains and ultimately forgets the real path of salvation. But when he is in distress he blames the physician, that is the preceptor.⁴⁶ In another song, Lalan criticises the *Shariat* (orthodox) Muslims, who lay much emphasis on outward formalities, *Namāz*, *Rozā* and *Kalmā*, etc. But he thinks that religion means earnest devotion to God, so a sincere heart will not waste time practising all these formalities.⁴⁷ Lalan Shah also tells of the indescribability of God. The existence of God is felt everywhere but he cannot be seen or touched. It cannot be said if He is like fire, air or water.⁴⁸ He advises that during *Prakriti Sāadhanā* the devotee has to undergo a number of formalities, many of them are not socially sanctioned. In spite of that, he must go on performing these without having any attachment to them.⁴⁹ The philosophy of non-attachment to worldly things is the central theme of Lalan's songs.

Some of Lalan's songs are full of pathos. They do not tell us of the philosophy of the creed but describe of weal and woes of human life.⁵⁰ Again in some songs, he deals with the social ideas, such as denial of caste system. The Baul poet condemns the caste-system outright and appreciates a Brahmin taking meal at the hands of *Chandāl* (Low caste Hindu).⁵¹ Lalan feels the presence of the 'man of

46. Ibid., song no. 15.

47. Ibid., song no. 23.

48. Monsuruddin, *Haramani*, pp. 64—65.

49. Das M., and Mahapatra, P. K. (Ed) *Lalan-Gitikā*, song no. 1.

50. Monsuruddin, loc. cit., *Sāhitya Patrika*, 1363 B. S. song no. 50.

51. Das M., and Mahapatra, P. K. (Ed), song no. 54.

heart' within himself. If he can catch hold of him, he will not let him go.⁵² In another song, Lalan clearly states the importance of guru in his life. Like a Vaiṣṇava, he needs the strong hand of a guru, who will steer him safely to salvation. The guru of a Bāul is known as Murshid and the songs composed in praise of guru are called Murshidā.⁵³

The Bāul songs did not attract the attention of the educated public until Rabindranath collected and published a number of these songs from the Kusthia district* (now in East Bengal).

Besides Lalan Shah, we know of some other Bāul singers. Among them Golak Chandra Banerjee of Pabna district and Harinath Mazumdar[†] of Kumarkhali (now in East Bengal) were celebrated singers.⁵⁴ In a song, Harinath speaks of the hypocrisy of human nature. He says that the taking of a *bhek* and *tilak* does not indicate man's earnestness for spiritual cultivation. He says, when man becomes vulgar and shallow he talks of strictly adhering to all the outward formalities.⁵⁵ This song of Harinath indicates that he was also a rationalist like Lalan. Padmalochan Jadubindu was also a famous Bāul singer.⁵⁶ The Bāul songs had won the hearts of village folks of Bengal. The Hindu and Muslim Bāuls along with their compatriots used to assemble on the full moon night of the month of

52. Ibid., Song no. 16.

53. Munshi, H, "Murshid Bā Bhāva Gān", *Pravāsi*, Agrahāyan 1335 B. S.

* These songs have been compiled in the book 'Lalan Gītikā' and published by the Calcutta University.

[†]Harinath Mazumdar was also known as Kāngāl Harinath.

54. Bhattacharjee, U. N., op cit., part I, p. 103.

55. Deb, A. K. *Vanger Kabitā*, Vol. II, p. 362,

56. Bhattacharjee, U. N, op, cit., Part I, p. 106,

Māgh (January and February) in the Dargāh where they offered their presents and sang the *murshidā* throughout the night. The main singer or the *mulgāyak* used to sing with the accompaniment of a *gopījantra* (a kind of musical instrument) and others followed him verse after verse. Bāul songs were popular all over Bengal both among the high and low class people. The muslim cultivators of North Bengal greatly enjoyed it. The peasants of Eastern Bengal used to sing those songs.⁵⁷ Actually, all of them did not profess this faith, yet the songs attracted them. The Bāul songs occupy a prominent place in the Bāul movement of Bengal because, songs were the only mode of expression of faith. They were melodious and lyrical. These songs were known as *Dehatattwer-gān* in North Bengal and 'Bāul gān' in West Bengal.⁵⁸

Sudharam was another Bāul *Sādhaka* who flourished during this period. He was born in 1761 in the village of Matibhanga in Dacca district.⁵⁹ He was a Sudra by caste. Sudharam earned his livelihood as a milkman but from his boyhood he behaved towards others a bit abnormally. So he was considered to be mad. His teachings are simple and unritualistic; he asked people to love all high and low and worship Krishna. As he gave life to a dying lady, Jamuna, many supernatural qualities were attributed to him.⁶⁰ Though he was a *Udāsīn* Bāul, he tried to avoid the immoralities, usually associated with that branch of the sect. It indicates that during the period under review, a change in their thinking had been introduced. Like Lalan Shah, Sudharam also wanted

57. "Murshida Gān", *Bhāratī*, Bhādra, 1331 B. S,

58. Haq Enamul, op, cit., p,

59. Dutta, J. N. "Budhārām Bāul", *Pratibhā*, Srāvan 1318 B. S.

60. Ibid.

to avoid the path of moral degradation. He drew adherents from all classes especially from Bikrampur (in Dacca district). Among his disciples were Ramcharan Bāul of village Narasingdih and Bhikarichand, a Brahmin of Mymensingh.⁶¹ Mention may be made of other Bāuls of this period. They were Gosai Nilchand, Pagla Kanai, Hiralal, Mochal-chand, Khedmat Sai, Chorman Ali, Azim, Madan and Gopal.⁶² Their exact dates are not known, but they all flourished sometime between 1770 to 1850.

The Bāuls were totally unorthodox in their attitude; their ideas and activities defied all custom or tradition. The orthodox Muslims could not tolerate that and from second half of the nineteenth century, a reform movement grew up. The leaders of this movement were Maulana Keramat Ali, the leaders of Wahabi movement* and Haji Shariatullah, the leader of Feraizi movement.⁶³ These

61, Ibid.

* By the first half of the nineteenth century, a religious movement originated among the Muslims of Bengal. They wanted to revive the pristine purity of the Koranic principles and establish them. Later on, it was directed in driving out the English from India. The movement continued for a long time. Bengal was the seat of this movement and then it spread to different parts of India.

+ Feraizi movement— by this time, an economic cum religious movement grew in Faridpur district of Eastern Bengal, under Haji Shariatullah. He was much influenced by the principles of Wahabis, but during the forties of the nineteenth century, it changed its course. He wanted to save his followers from the oppresssion of the Zamindars. Under his instruction, the peasant demanded, 'all lands belong to the god', and we shall not pay taxes to the Zamin-dars. In created a great agitation among the peasants of East Bengal. It earned much popularity but could not be totally successful.

62, Monsuruddin, *Haramani*, p. 14,

63. Haq Enamul, op. cit., p. 189 and p. 190.

people followed the Koranic principles strictly, and it was therefore natural for them to ask the muslims among the Bāuls to follow them. They said that as the Bāuls of Bengal had vulgarised the original principles, their religious practices should be scrupulously boycotted.⁶⁴ They argued that the restriction on respiratory system and thereby attaining the Supreme bliss had nowhere been enjoined in the Koran. The *Shariat* Muslims also opposed it vehemently and demanded its total extinction.⁶⁵ Now-a-days, we see very few Bāuls, the little remnants now live in Birbhum and Bankura districts. They usually gather at the fair at Kendubilwa* in Birbhum district⁶⁶. According to the census of 1891, there were 666 male Bāuls and 707 female Bāuls in Bengal.⁶⁷

Social Significance

Generally, the down-trodden and the lower strata of the society gathered round the movement. The outcastes, the excommunicated persons of the society, found place in it. This movement gave social recognition to those who could not otherwise have got it elsewhere. Thus it had a binding effect upon a very large section of the people of Bengal. Poet Rabindranath appreciated the songs of Lalan Shah greatly and it is said that he was much influenced by them. He has remarked that the Bāuls, through their songs had contributed much to bring about religious harmony among different religions, for which the religious sects were striving

64. Ahmad, R. op. cit., p. 45.

65. Ibid.

66. Ghose, B. *Paschim Vanga*, etc. p. 153

67. Bose, P. N. op. cit, vol. II, p. 112.

*This place is also known as Kenduli, where the great poet Jaydeva was born.

so long,⁶⁸ This positive aspect of the movement had a far-reaching effect upon the whole society, irrespective of social position or religious affiliation. The Bāul songs were heard and sung not only by the Bāuls but they were so popular that people everywhere sang them and drew inspiration from them. The impact was so great that popular literature and other forms of art and culture could not remain outside the influence of the Bāul songs. The *Yātrā* song (the earlier form of drama) are the best illustrations of it.

Their ideals were great. But since the movement fell mainly in the hands of persons having very little education, it failed to regenerate the society. People gathered round it with their vices and weaknesses, so they were attracted more towards naturalism than disciplined religious life. The lack of discipline among them brought many immoralities. Consequently, degeneration started and thwarted the progress of the movement.

Chapter III

Shastric and Puranic Deities

(a) Saivism

The worship of Siva has been a very popular and old religious practice of the Hindus. Siva has been considered as the god of all gods.

In most of the Hindu families of Bengal, Siva has been regarded as the giver of good husbands and children.¹ He is represented by a black elliptical shaped piece of stone, called *Siva linga*. The conception of *Siva-linga* emerged since Parvati worshipped Siva and imagined him to be present in a piece of stone. In some places of East Bengal, (now in Bangladesh) Siva-worship is designated as *Nil Pujā*.² This Nil indicates *Nilkantha* or blue-necked Siva. *Nil Pujā* takes place on a certain day in *Phālgun* (February-March); persons desirous of observing this *brata* (festival) have to fast the whole day and to keep up the whole night for worshipping the *Siva-linga*.³ Siva is also regarded by the peasants as giver of good crops.⁴ From the very beginning the non-Aryans too worshipped Siva as the generator of power and fertility in nature. In many parts of Bengal, Siva is designated and worshipped as *Panchānanda**⁵ (Siva, having five faces). He was also adored as *Kshetrpāl* (god of the land). The *mantras* by which he was invoked was a

1. Bhattacharjee, G. *Bānglā Kāvye Siva*, p. 103.
 2. Ibid.
 3. O 'Malley, L. S. S. *Bengal District Gazetteers* (Hooghly), p. 105.
 4. Bhattacharjee, G. op. cit., pp. 103 and 122.
 5. Ghose, B. *Paschim Vanga Sanskriti*, p. 680.
- * Panchānan and Panchānanda were synonymous.

68. *Rabindra Rachanāvali*, Vol. 14, pp. 962-964.

curious mixture of Sanskrit and aboriginal words, which suggest that the god was popular mostly among the low-class people. The Nath Yogis acted as the priest of Panchānanda and they also took pleasure in magical charms. Panchānanda gained great popularity in the districts of Hooghly and Howrah.⁶

Although Siva is worshipped daily by some of the householders, the annual worship of Siva fell on the day before the full moon in the month of *Phālgun* (February-March). This *brata* is known as *Sīvarātri brata* and is especially observed by the women folk.

Sīvarātri melās (fairs) were held in Jangram and Nava-bhat in the Burdwan district.⁷ They were attended by thousands of people that included some Muslims as well.

Although the number of Siva-worshippers was large, the number of Śaiva mendicants was small. People, who had completely renounced family life and lived on alms were called *Sanyāsīs*. All Śaiva *Sanyāsīs* were seen with ashes smeared on their person and long clotted hair on their head. They took alms only from the Brahmins and strictly adhered to celibacy. The drinking of *Samvidā* (Gānjā) was considered to be an essential part of their worship. like the wine-drinking of the Śaktas. They attended the *Upanayana* (Investiture with the sacred thread) and *Annaprāśan* (religious ceremony on the occasion of the first rice-giving to the child) ceremony, but never touched metal or fire, as they were symbols of homelife. These mendicants drew three parallel straight lines on their forehead, which were called *Tripundra*. The mendicants generally gathered

at Varanasi, Bakreswar (in Birbhum district). Jalpeswar (in Jalpaiguri district) and Tarakeswar (in Hooghly district).¹⁰

The Śaiva mendicants could be broadly divided into three groups, the *Aghoris*, the *Dandīs* and the *Nāth Yogīs*. To become an Aghori, one had to live a celibate-life for long eight or ten years and then he was initiated as an Aghori.¹¹ They were believed to possess supernatural powers. They wore long ear-rings, grew long beards and most of them had necklaces of human skulls. They generally lived in clusters. This group was gradually losing its popularity and only some persons of the group flocked at Varanasi.

Dandī-Sanyāsīs were generally very learned and well versed in the Vedānta and Nyāya* philosophy.¹² People from different provinces came to them to gather knowledge. Sankaracharya, the great philosopher, was a Dandī Sanyāsī. Only Brahmins were admitted to the rank of Dandī. They took meals once a day and never accepted water or food from persons belonging to other castes. These sanyāsīs strictly adhered to *Ashram* life where they continued their religious and scholarly pursuits. Each one of them wore *gairik bastra* (cloth dyed with red chalk) and necklace of rosary beads (*Rudrāksha mālā*), rubbed ashes on their bodies and shaved their heads. They never touched fire and utensils and this rigidity of life was their distinctive feature. After death, their bodies were burnt or thrown into the river. The rules of initiation were very difficult. Before initiating a person, the Guru asked the Dandī

10 Mitra, S. C. "On the worship of the deity of Jalpeswar", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1931, Vol. II.

11. Ghosal, J. *Kās'i Parikramā*, p. 166.

12. Wilson, H. H. op. cit., p. 28; Ghosal, J. op. cit., p. 167.

* It is an important branch of Hindu philosophy, it means the science of reasoning.

6. Ibid.

7. Mitra, A. *Fairs and Festivals of West Bengal*, p.3.

8. Wilson, H. H. *Religions of the Hindus*, p. 103.

9. Dutta, A. K. *Bhārat Barsiya Upāsak Sampradāya*, Vol. II. p. 16.

Sanyāsi several questions, regarding shastras and tried to find out if he was really capable of renouncing family life. Then the Guru gave him a new name and whispered *mantras* (portions of sacred texts) composed of ten words into his ears. The person so initiated, had then to burn his sacred thread or throw the same into a river and carry a stick or *Dandī* in his hand, which was supposed to be the seat of Mahamāyā, (an incarnation of *s'akti*) the sole object of their veneration. Then the *Dandī Sanyāsi* was designated as *Paramhansa*¹³ (great ascetic). But it is curious to note, that some of the *Dandīs* professed Tantricism and took wine and meat. These mendicants were very few in number and were found at Haridwar and Varanasi.

There was another group of S'aiva-yogīs known as Nāth Yogīs who used trident marks on their forehead and observed S'ivarātri festivals.¹⁴ They had no concern with God because they thought that God lived in their own bodies and thus they professed the esoteric yoga-system. They practised the custom of burning the dead in a sitting position. Their non-belief in God and non-observance of any Brahmanical rites made them objects of contempt of the society. So the group never became popular and the number of Nāth yogīs remained small. The district of Rangpur in North Bengal was the stronghold of the Nāth Yogīs.¹⁵

S'aivism in popular form influenced the Hindu Society much more than the *Dandīs* and the *Aghorīs*, which besides having some traits of S'aktaism were obscure in nature. It exercised a great influence on the upper class society, espe-

13. Ibid.

14. Bhattacharjee, H, (Ed.) *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol, 4, p, 280.

15. Mitra, S, C, "A note on the Nath sect", *Journal of Anthropological society of Bengal*, Vol, 15, no. 5.

cially of the Pabna district.¹⁶ A large number of householders used to worship Siva and curiously enough most of them were Brahmins. Some of the Brahmins and other high caste Hindus used to sacrifice goats to Siva.¹⁷

Besides the Shastric form of S'aivism there developed in Bengal, another very popular stream of S'aivism especially among the low-caste people. This popular S'aivism was known by the name of Gambhīrā on the eastern side of the Ganges,¹⁸ and by the name of Gājan in the districts of Midnapore, Birbhum, Burdwan, Nadia, Hooghly, 24 Parganas, Khulna, Jessore and Faridpur.¹⁹ The origin of Gambhīrā and Gajān is very old.

Gambhīra means Siva, and Gambhīrā means the abode or the temple of S'iva,²⁰ Emperor Harshavardhan, for the satisfaction of his people installed images of Buddha, Vishnu and S'iva. In course of time, only the image of S'iva was retained. This image of S'iva was placed in a broken temple and was worshipped according to Buddhistic method of worship, in which people rubbed dust and mud on their bodies and sang and danced in praise of S'iva.²¹ Generally, the Gambhīrā temple was in a dilapidated condition and the image therein was also broken. Gambhīrā was generally selected for worship by the poor people.

The worship of Gambhīra, or Gambhīrā festival, as it was called, was a five day affair²², which generally started on the 26th of Chaitra.²³ The function of

16. Saha, R, R, *Pabna Jelār Itihas*, Part VI, pp, 15-30ff.

17. Mitra, S, K, *Jessore Khulnār Itihās*, Vol, 1, p, 405.

18. Palit, H, *Adyer Gambhīrā*, p, 8

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid. p. 1

21. Palit, H "Adyer Gambhīrā" *Sāhitya Parishad Patrika* 1316 B S S No 1

22. Palit, H op cit p. 22

23. Ibid.

the first evening was known as *Ghata-Sthāpan*. That evening, the devotees brought water in pots and placed them in the Gambhīrā temple. On the second day, i. e. the day of *Chota Vāmāsā* the worship of Hara Pārvatī began and the devotees took vows there. On the third day i. e. the day of *Bara Tāmāsā* the devotees recited hymns in praise of Śiva. The fourth day function was known as *Āhāra* or the day of feasts, and the fifth day function known as *Charak puja*. It was customary for all the villagers to pay their homage to this abode and then sing around the temple.²⁴ In the Gambhīrā, the worship was not performed by any priest, but the devotees themselves did it. Although this festival was observed in all the districts on the eastern side of the Ganges, the Gambhīrā festival of Malda was very famous.²⁵

There were Gambhīrās in almost all the villages of Bengal. In almost every village, different castes had their own *mandals* (leader) and each *madal* had one Gambhīrā under him.²⁶ He was entrusted with the duty of supervising the Gambhīrā under him.²⁶ The Zamindar or the Chief of the locality used to assign lands or annual stipends for the maintenance of the Gambhīrā. Besides this, if a man died without any heir, his property was attached to the Gambhīrā. A person committing offence begged apology from the Gambhīrā by offering a requisite fee. Thus the Gambhīrās were generally in a prosperous condition.

Another form of popular Śaivism was Gājan. The word 'Gājan' seems to be a compound of two words, viz, 'Gā' and 'Jan'. 'Gā' means a village, and 'jan' stands for the people.²⁷ Therefore Gājan means the festival of the village

24. Ibid. p, 12,

25. Ibid. p. 1.

26. Ibid. p. 12.

27. Sen, R. K. "A short Account of the Charak Puja Ceremonies" *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1833, Vol, II, No 24.

people. Gājan has also been interpreted to be a degeneration of the word 'Garjan' meaning the roaring sound, which was produced due to mass singing during the festival.²⁸ Therefore, the worship of Śiva in which the whole village community participated by singing and dancing came to be known as Gājan. It is generally believed that it had Buddhistic origin. In the beginning the Buddhists used to observe solemn festivals, but from the time of Harshavardhan, it was attended with dancing and singing, which appealed to the illiterate masses greatly.²⁹ With the decay of Buddhism in India, especially in Bengal, many of the Buddhists became Śaivas and introduced many of the Buddhistic practices into Śaivism. The common man mainly the peasants, adopted the method of worshipping Śiva with the accompaniment of singing and dancing and they did so especially during the harvesting time to propitiate Śiva, as he is considered to be the god of fertility.³⁰

Great preparation was needed for the performance of the Gājan puja, which was held in the month of Chaitra.³¹ The selection of *Sanyāsīs* (devotees), who were to perform the puja, was first made. The selection was made irrespective of caste consideration. Most of these *Sanyāsīs* were recruited from the *Hāri*, *Bāgdi* and *Dom* castes.³² They were generally poor and were free from family responsibilities. After selection, the selected *Sanyāsīs* had to purify themselves by abstaining from rich and spicy food and keeping apart from any ceremonial pollution, till the Gājan was

28. Palit, H, "Śīber Gājan," *Sāhitya Parishad Patrika*, 1818 B. S. Nos. 3.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

* Generally the Gājan festival starts on the 28th Chaitra and continues for four days.

31. Murdoch, J. *Hindu and Muhammedan Festivals*, p 48

32. "Charak Pujā", *Asiatic Journal*, January 1828

over. They had to eat only one meal a day and had to visit the Śiva temple daily. Although not entitled to wear the sacrificial thread as they belonged to low-caste, they kept *Upabit* (Sacred thread) and performed religious functions.³³ The selection of devotees from the low class may be because of the influence of "Dharma Thākur"⁺ whose puja was performed by priests recruited from the lower class.³⁴ The Gājan festival was of four days' duration. On the first day the sanyāsīs had to observe partial fasting. On the second day they had to live on fruit, which the Sanyāsīs gathered by begging and depositing in the temple. This day was also called the fruit day or the day of *Phalabhanga*.³⁵ Complete silence was to be maintained while taking meals. The sanyāsīs in order to keep their minds free from distractions created by the noise coming from outside arranged for the continuous beating of drums.

The third day which was the day preceding the Charak festival started with the *Ghatasthāpan* or the placing of sacred pot.³⁶ After performing this ceremony the Sany-

33. "Bengali Festivals and Holidays" *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 18 1852

+ Dharma Thākur was worshipped as Sun God, but it was represented by an image of Tortoise or a mound of earth being rubbed with vermillion. Wine, meat and cakes were offered to it. This god was popular mostly among the low caste people, viz, the Dom, Sunri and Chāndāl; Pt Haraprasad Sastri was of the opinion that Dharma Thākur was the last remnant of Buddhism in Bengal.

34. Sen, S, (Ed,) *Ruprāmer Dharmamangal* (Introduction), pp, 7-15 Gait, E, A, *Census of India* 1901.

Vol, 6, Part I, pp, 201-204.

35. Mardoch, J, op. cit. p. 48.

36. Palit, H, op cit. p. 64.

āsīs accompanied by the villagers as well as the other mendicants went in a procession to a certain place. The procession of the Hooghly district generally went to Tarakeswar and the processions of Calcutta and adjoining places terminated at Kalighat.³⁷ In the procession, the devotees used to place a piece of stone in a palanquin, which was known as '*Gājune-S'iva*' (Śiva, belonging to the Gājan ceremony), round which they danced and sang songs.³⁸ Some of them dressed themselves as ghosts, demons or elfins and some wore terrifying masks of tigers and bears. The procession was accompanied by drums which were constantly beaten by the domes (low caste Hindus). Occasional shouts of "Bholā Maheshwar" rent the sky with noise, as the procession proceeded towards its destination. Procession halted at every house and dances were held in front of every temple. Sometimes the processionists sang vulgar songs and made indecent gestures. The procession was also accompanied by a band of caricaturists which gave a special charm to it. These caricaturists performed caricature in which they generally tried to ridicule some contemporary social evils. Pantomines were also shown during the procession. These pantomines generally depicted some contemporary events. Such processions of pantomines were known by the name of *Sanger michil*.³⁹ The pantomines of Jelepāra and Kansaripāra (in Calcutta) were famous.⁴⁰ While the procession was in progress the Sanyāsīs used to sing songs in praise of Śiva. These songs were known as Gājan songs. They depicted the achievements of Śiva and the different incidents of his life.

37. Ghose, B, *Paschim Vanga Sanskriti*, p. 561.

38. Bhattacharjee, A., op cit, pp. 18-19.

39. Banerjee, B. N. *Sambād Patre* etc. Vol. II, p. 373; Sinha, . K. P, op.cit., p.5.

40. Seth, H. *Prāchin Kalikātā Parichaya*, p 235

For a detailed study see *Chaitramāser song*, edited by J. N Ghose, pp. 8, 24 and 19

In a verse, the poet asks the wooden seat (the *Khāta*, on which the Gājan Śīva is placed) as to where it had been for all the eleven months of the year. Now in the twelfth, month, i. e. in the month of Chaitra, it had remembered the Śīva of Gājan.⁴¹ In another song, Parvati entreats Hara (Śīva) to buy a pair of *Sāṅkhā* (bangles made of conch) for her (Parvati) as she was preparing to go to her father's house. If she went without the bangles, people would speak ill of Śīva. Then Śīva expressed his deep sorrow and asked as to how could he buy bangles for her when he earned his livelihood by begging.⁴² In another, a rich merchant who died because he had worshipped Śīva with stale flowers, was restored to life after twelve years by a devotee, who had the blessing of Śīva.⁴³ In another, it is said that the Ganga which was born out of Vishnu's music and held in *Kaman-dalu* (a pot of water generally used by the mendicants) by Brahma was received by Śīva on his head, when Bhagirath, a king of the Surya dynasty, led her to the earth to redeem the world.⁴⁴ In another song, the unity of god-heads has been emphasised. It has been said there that there is no difference between Guru (Śīva) and Brahma.⁴⁵

When the processionists reached the destination, the piercing of tongues and backs of the mendicants took place.

Blacksmiths were kept ready to perform this function for which they charged nominal fees.⁴⁶ Sometimes the sanyāsīs themselves pierced pointed iron rods in their bodies or kept burning rods on their foreheads. This was probably done for fulfilment of a vow which the

41. Mukherjee, S.N., Nadia Jessorer Gājan Gīti", *Basumati*, Māgh, 1335 B. S.

42. Ibid., Bhādra, 1336 B. S.

43. Ibid., Māgh, 1335 B. S.

44. Ibid., Māgh, 1337. B. S.

45. Ibid., Māgh, 1335 B. S.

46. Murdoch, J. op. cit., pp. 48-49.

Sanyāsīs took when they were ill. After going through this self-inflicted tortures, the Sanyāsīs started dancing and singing in the name of Śīva. People in appreciation showered on them sweets and flowers and the devotees in order to get the cheering applause of the mob came in front of them with their whole body besmeared with blood.

In the afternoon, some more cruel acts were performed.⁴⁷ The first was the *Jhul sanyās*, in which two upright posts joined at the top by a cross bar were erected, holding which a mendicant remained hanging with hands downwards, where on the ground fire was constantly burning. The second was the *Kāntāsanyās*, in which thorny branches of trees were strewn on the ground and the Sanyāsīs had to throw themselves on it. The third and the most terrifying was the *Jhāmp-Sānyās*, in which many circular and semi-circular knives were stretched on the ground and the Sanyāsīs had to walk over them. In performing these acts, the Sanyāsīs had to sustain many cuts; blood oozed out from their bodies and sometimes they became senseless while the festival continued till midnight.

The women folk, who fasted for the whole day in honour of Śīva, went in the evening to the temple of Maheswar (another name of Śīva) and consecrated everything in the name of Nīla, who started worshipping Śīva at the age of twelve and continued to do so for many years to get back her husband, who had become a Sanyāsī.⁴⁸ This puja was therefore, called *Nilāvati pūjā* and was popular in Bojanda in the Burdwan district.⁴⁹

47. "Charak puja", *Calcutta Review*, January, 1828, pp.33-35 ;

Palit, H. , "Charake Bān Forār Itibrittwa", *Pravāsi*, Jaistha 1319 B. S.

48. Ibid,

49. Sen, D. C. *Vanga Bhāsā o Sāhitya*, p, 561,

50. Mitra, A, op. cit., p, 2,

On the fourth day before sunrise, a queer ceremony known as *Māsān dance* was performed by the Sanyāsīs, in which the Sanyāsīs danced with dead bodies, which the *domes* had brought from the cremation ground some days ago.⁵¹ It is said that the more rotten the corpse was the greater importance it would receive. If a corpse was not available, they would dance with human skulls. While dancing, the Sanyāsīs sprinkled blood of the corpse in the belief that that would increase the fertility of the soil. In Kurmun, a village in the Burdwan district, the Gājan-Sanyāsīs not only sprinkled the blood of the corpse but during the time of *pestilence* they also offered the blood of a living body by piercing their own body with a sword.⁵² This thirst for blood among the Gājan sanyāsīs can be explained by the fact that hunting was the chief means of livelihood of the people of *Rārḥ-Bānglā*, (a part of West Bengal including Burdwan, Birbhum and Hooghly district) which was inhabited by the Kole, Mundas and Santhals. Śīva, who was a non-Aryan god was depicted by the Rārḥ-Bengalees as a bloodthirsty and horrifying god. Probably, this non-Aryan element left a deep impression on the people and that is why self-torture and other horrifying activities were important features of the Gājan-pūjā.

After the Māsān-dance, Śīva and Parvati were worshipped. The Sanyāsīs then singing hymns of Śīva went towards the tank and dived into the water in search of the Charak tree, a long wooden pole which had been immersed in the tank the previous year.⁵³ After great exertions, the wooden pole which was generally fifteen feet high was taken out of the water and fixed to the ground. Hooks

51. Bhattacharjee, A, op. cit., pp, 18-19 ;

Palit, H, op. cit. p. 41,

52. Ghose, B, Paschim Banga etc, pp. 766-707.

53. Palit, H, Loc, cit, *Sāhitya Parishad Patrika*, 1316 B, S, No, 1 Bhattacharjee, A. op cit, p. 20.

were then pierced into the back of the Sanyāsīs who wanted to participate in the swinging event. The Sanyāsīs with hooks on their backs were tied to the long rope which was kept hanging from the pole. Normally eight to ten Sanyāsīs could swing at a time. In the pole of Bagbazar, which was generally known as *Solo charkhi*, sixteen persons could swing at a time.⁵⁴ It was not a very uncommon sight that some of the sanyāsīs so swinging were thrown quite far away like a mass of stone. We get such an instance when a sanyāsī swinging from the pole fixed by Radhakanta Munshi was thrown thirty yards away and died.⁵⁵ Besides swinging round the charak tree the sanyāsīs practised other kinds of self-torture. Some of them put blazing hooks through their sides and some bedaubed their mouths by putting mud on lips and threw some seeds on it and waited till the seeds germinated.⁵⁶ Fanny Parkes, a European traveller, described an incident, in which a man with his head fixed to the ground and his legs upwards was undergoing pain in order to fulfil a vow to Mahādeva.⁵⁷

A great *melā* (fair) was held on the occasion of the charak pūjā, usually at a place near the Charak tree, where the swinging event was held.⁵⁸ This fair was frequented by people of all ages and castes. Mendicants, merely attired in loin cloth and almost naked also gathered there. Even prostitutes and dancing girls could be seen in the fair. The fair was a place for amusement and entertainment for the

54. Dutta. P. K. "Kalikātār Itibrittwa" *Nabyabhārat*. Māgh, 1310 B. S.

55. Bannerjee, B. N. op. cit, Vol, II. p. 371.

56. Murdoch, J. op. cit. p. 50.

57. Parkes, F. op. cit. Vol. I, p. 26.

*Another such incident occurs in *Narrative of a journey through the Upper provinces of India (1824-25)* by R. Heber, Vol. I, p. 76.

58. "Charak Pūjā", *Asiatic Journal*, 1832, Vol. 18

poor and the rich alike, who freely spent money on these prostitutes.⁵⁹ Colourful and gay dresses of the visitors marked the occasion. Some arrangements for amusement like magic shows and *nāgardolā* (merry-go-round) were also made to attract the people. Among the other interesting things of the fair were the shops, selling terracotta images, especially of Śiva and Parvati. The most attractive event in the fair, however, was the swinging on the Charak tree and the different kinds of show of self-inflicted tortures performed by the devotees. The wealthy babus of the late eighteenth century who found pleasure in baijee dance, (professional dancer) Kabi songs* and cock-fight also patronised these performances and spent large sums of money on it.⁶⁰

The zamindars of the locality also encouraged charak swinging. We find instances of Charak pūjā being performed at the *maidan* (field) of Chatu Babu and Latu Babu, who spent large sums of money in organising them.⁶¹ It is said that because of their great influence in society they sometimes coerced the low class people to perform these horrifying shows. The "Baboos"† paid the performers small annual stipends for these acts and the poor, the indigent people of low castes allowed themselves to be recruited for performing these shows during the Charak pūjā.⁶²

60. Sinha, K. P. op. cit. p. 4.

61. Mullick, P. N. *Kalikātār Kathā*, (Madhyakhanda), p. 71.

*For details see Section (c) of this chapter.

** Both of them were sons of Ramdulal Dey, who was known as the *Dhana kuvera* (Millionaire) of Calcutta.

†For a detailed study of the 'Baboos', see '*Naba Bābu bilās*' by Bhawani Charan Bandopadhyay and *Sāmvad Patre Sekāler Kathā* by B. N. Bannerjee, Vol. I, pp. 99-100.

62. "Charak", *Calcutta Christian Observer*, April, 1836, Vol. 5, pp. 196-197; Banerjee, B. N. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 373.

This charak *melā* or Chaitra *Sanbrānti melā* (held on the last day of the month of Chaitra) was held in different parts of Bengal, but the *melā* of Kantorb in Midnapore district had a special reputation,⁶³ and people from almost all parts of Bengal used to gather there. The biggest *melā* of Calcutta was held at Beadon street, which was attended by about five thousand people.⁶⁴

The Government of the East India Company which had been following a policy of non-interference in religious and social matters did not pass any order or legislation to stop the inhuman practices during the Charak festival. The Christian Missionaries denounced these practices and wanted the intervention of the Police to stop Charak swinging ceremony.⁶⁵ They were of the opinion that "whatever change a quarter of a century has produced on a scanty and minute section of the upper classes of the natives, no refining influence has extended to the mighty mass."⁶⁶ The newly educated progressive middle class also demanded its total abolition, on the ground that the Charak pūjā was not sanctioned by the Hindu shastras, and a good number of lives were lost every year.⁶⁷ They contended that the poor low-caste people who allowed their bodies to be pierced by iron hooks did so merely to earn money and not out of any religious sentiment or fervour. But the *Subarna-banik* (dealers in gold) class, who had been the promoter of Charak festival so long, stood firm as the Charak gave them an opportunity to earn a name among the

63. Palit, H. Loc. cit., Sāhitya Parishad Patrika, 1316 B. S. No. 1.

64. Mitra, A. op. cit., p. 3.

65. *Friend of India*, April 26, 1836 (weekly), p. 194; "Charak Pūjā", *Calcutta Christian Observer* May 1837, p. 270.

66. "The Charak Pūjā", *Friend of India*, April 16, 1840 (Quarterly Series), p. 247.

67. *The Reformer*, April 1, 1833, Vol. 3 (Col. 2)

people.⁶⁸ They also quoted shastras in support of the swinging ceremony. John Bull, a leading paper of Calcutta, at that time, urged the Government that the Charak pūjā should be allowed since the official policy had been not to interfere with the religious sentiments of the people.⁶⁹

The attention of the Court of Directors in England was drawn towards this problem, because of the regular protest against the Charak pūjā by the Christian missionaries. At the instance of the Court of Directors, inquiries were instituted in districts like 24 Parganas and Hooghly.⁷⁰ But nothing positive came out of it. The Government only asked the Collectors to follow a persuasive method in suppressing this practice. Halliday, (1854—1859) the then Lt. Governor of Bengal, asked the Christian missionaries to mobilise public opinion against the cruel practices during the Charak.⁷¹ But the Christian missionaries wanted that something positive should be done. They submitted a petition to the Legislative Council against the swinging ceremony and other cruel practices.⁷² They wanted that a clause should be inserted in all lease or grants of land prohibiting the cruel practices during the Charak. Grant, (1859—1862) who succeeded Halliday as Lt. Governor of Bengal ordered that the Charak with the swinging ceremony might be allowed only in places where it had been a long established custom, and prohibited that elsewhere.⁷³ Ultimately by the Act of 1865, the cruel per-

68. *Samvādpūrṇa Chandrodāya*, Baisākh 23, 1259 B. S.

69. John Bull quoted in the *Reformer*, April 21, 1833, Vol. 3, No. 117, (Col. 1)

70. Buckland, C. E. *Bengal Under Lt. Governors*, Vol. 1, p. 31.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid., p. 177.

73. Ibid.

formances during the Charak was totally prohibited by the Government.⁷⁴

(b) Śāktaism

The word Śakti means energy. Śakti is the primordial force of the Universe. Śakti is personified in the Goddess Kālī, so the worshippers of Kālī are known as Śāktas. Their religious books are called Tantras. The *Kālīpūjā* (worship of Kālī) has been prevalent in Bengal from time immemorial. The origin of the Śāktipūjā dates back to the matriarchal society of the non-Aryans. The prominence of women in non-Aryan society led to the conception of Śakti worship. In the Ramayana also, we get references to Śāktipūjā.² But Śāktaism in its present form essentially grew out of the fusion of Buddhism and Tantricism.

Buddhism at the time of its disintegration became divided into two branches, Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna.³ The Hīnayāna Buddhists were conservative by nature. They observed strict principles in practising religion. Their ultimate aim was to attain salvation. That aim was to be achieved through rigorous practice. But the Mahāyāna Buddhists were comparatively liberal in their outlook, and they paid less attention to the religious formalities. They were said to imbued with the quality of universal love. Because of this liberalism, it succeeded in drawing innume-

74. Majumdar, R. C. (Ed.) *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Part II, p. 283.

1. Das Gupta, S. B. *Bhārata Śakti Sādhana o Śākta Sāhitya*, (Intro.), pp. 8—9, 10, 11 !

Goswami, K. G. *Prāgaitihāsik Mohenjo doro*, p. 75.

2. *Kṛttivāsa Rāmāyana*, pp. 517—523.

3. Majumdar, R. C. (Ed.) *The Struggle for Empire*. Vol. 5, pp. 404—409.

able males and females under its fold. The Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism became a prominent force during the Gupta period (316—550 A. D.).⁴ Tantricism, which was at that time quite popular among the Hindus, now began to influence the Buddhists to a great extent.⁵ The Buddhists under its influence began to practise esoteric-yoga system* as the means of salvation. Tantricism also laid great stress on naturalism (the belief in such a system of worship in which the natural qualities of the senses should not be suppressed). In this system of worship, they used to take the females as their partners in practising the Yoga. Not only that, the taking of wine during their *sādhana* (worship) so long practised by the Tantriks, was also adopted by the Buddhists. It also seems probable that the Buddhist *Bhiksus* and *Bhiksunis* (male and female mendicants) were directly influenced by the Tantrika *Dākinī* (witch) and *Joginīs* (female devotee) who composed songs and wore red *Sāris*⁶ (a piece of red-bordered cloth, especially used by Indian women). These female religionists were held in high esteem in Tantrika-society. The Buddhists, who adopted many of the Tantrika practices became known as Buddhist Sahajiyās.⁷ They decried the ritualistic aspect of religion. They were hardly distinguishable from the Tantriks.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact date when these

4. Ibid.

5. Bhattacharjee, H. (Ed.) *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. 4, pp. 260—261.

6. Vasu, R. 'Bouddha O Śaiva Dākinī Joginīder Kathā' *Sāhitya Parishad Patrikā*, 1333 B. S. No. 5 33, p. 42.

* According to this system, man is thought to be a microcosm, a miniature universe. Salvation is achieved if meditation centering round the body is performed properly.

7. Ibid., p. 43.

Buddhist Sahajiyās came into existence. According to some, their origin may be traced back to the end of the seventh century A. D. and from that time there began a process of mutual assimilation of ideas between the Tantriks and the Buddhists.⁸ This process of assimilation continued for a long time. According to R. C. Mazumdar the assimilation became complete before the end of the fourteenth century A. D.⁹ In Bengal, this assimilation was greatly facilitated by the Buddhist *Siddhāchāryas*.¹⁰ They, in their *Charyāpadas* tried to show the similarity between the two sects and the influence they exerted upon each other.

The Tantika-Sādhana which centered round the body was confined to a certain section of people only and the ordinary men had very little knowledge of it. The Tantra had laid down that the waking up of *Kulakundalinī* (latent power in man roused by yogic practices) was the only process of attaining salvation for a Śākta.¹¹ It was said to be the dormant divine energy in a man. *Kundala* means coiled. The power which remains coiled in the human body can be stirred up through meditation. It is said that there are six centres in the body. The power remains in the form of a sleeping serpent at the lowest bodily centre, at the base of the spinal column, which is the first centre. From there it goes to the penis, then to the naval, then to the throat and last of all it comes to the eyebrow. When the energy meets the brain, the *Sādhaka* attains his salvation or *puruṣasiddhi*. At this stage, the *sādhaka* forgets all worldly feelings and

8. Bhattacharjee, H. (Ed.) op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 199.

9. Mazumdar, R. C. *History of Bengal*, Vol. I, p. 421.

10. Ibid.

* The Buddhist Sahajiyā-yogīs of much renown are commonly known as the Siddhāchāryas. Tradition records that there were eighty-four Siddhāchāryas. The literature which they composed was known as Charyāpada.

11. Agambagish, Krishnananda, *Tantrasāra*, pp. 82-83.

comes nearer to Śīva (Śīva, the final reality that is Brahmā or God and Śakti is the power of Śīva. So Śīva is the abode of Śakti). The way that connects the different centres is known as *Susūmnā patha*. Through this way the energy flows from one end to the other. When the energy being awakened moves from one centre to the other, the Sādhaka feels a peculiar sensation. This mode of Sādhana is known as *Sat-Chakrabhedā*.¹² Only the worshippers with high spiritual attainments are recommended by the Tantra to go through this process.

In the Tantrika Upāsana, the importance of guru has been highly emphasized.¹³ It is the guru who selects the proper disciple for performing this difficult task.* In Śāktaism, initiation by a guru is extremely necessary for gaining the right of *Yoga* practice.¹⁴ Disciples are recruited irrespective of caste and sex. The preceptor initiates them on an auspicious day. He gives a separate *mantra* (portions of sacred text) to each person. The Sādhaka must maintain secrecy regarding the mantra and his tutelary deity. *Purāṣṭaran*, a religious performance is made to make the *mantra* more effective.¹⁵ Though this yoga-system was sanctioned by the śāstras and many were believed to have attained salvation through this practice, there was another way of Śakti Sādhana prevalent in the society. The ordinary men used to worship Kālī and Durgā as the emblem of Śakti. They laid emphasis on different rituals. *Yog-*

12. Pal, B. K. *Mahatma Lalan Fakir*, p. 29 ;
Aralon, A. *The Serpent Power*, (Intro.), pp. 1-3 ;
Majumder, R. C. op. cit., Vol 15, pp.413-414.
13. Agambagish, Krishnananda, op. cit., pp. 3-5.
14. Chakraborty, C. H. *Tantra Kathā*, p. 57.
15. Agambagish, Krishnananda, op. cit., pp. 35-37.

* Females were also considered as gurus. Ramkrishna was initiated by a woman preceptor named Bramhānī.

yajna (Sacrificial rites) etc., and were less critical of the meditative aspect of Śakti Sādhana. Generally, the ordinary householders preferred this system, and it gained great popularity throughout Bengal.

In Bengal, *Daśamahāvidyā* was regarded as the tutelary deity of the Śāktas.¹⁶ This *Daśamahāvidyā* included the names of Kālī, Tārā, Saroshī, Bhuvaneswari, Bhavānī, Chinnamastā, Dhūmavati, Bagalāmukhi, Mātangi and Kamalā. The goddess of Śakti was known by different names according to local tradition. In Dacca, her name was Dhākeswari.¹⁷ and in Jessore, she was known by the name Jessoreswari.¹⁸ Tārā was a popular goddess in the Barisal and Birbhum districts.¹⁹ In chotrabhog of the district of 24 Parganas, the goddess Tripurāsundarī was popular among the masses. Rankinī Devī was worshipped in the village Inda in the Midnapore district.²⁰* It shows that the goddess Kālī was very popular in Bengal and was worshipped by a good number of people under different names.

Broadly speaking, the Śāktas were divided into two main groups, *Dakshināchārīs* and *Vāmachārīs*. The people who worshipped according to the dictates of the Vedas were called *Dakshināchārīs*. They never touched wine but performed animal sacrifice.²¹ The *Dakshināchārī* Śāktas are hardly distinguishable from ordinary Hindus, except in

16. Chakraborty, C. H. op. cit., p. 51 ;
Roy, B. C. *Annadāmangala*, pp. 16-18.
17. Roy, J. *Daccar Itihas*, p. 367.
18. Chakraborty, C. H. op. cit., p. 53.
19. Ibid., p. 54.
20. Ibid.

* For many other names see *Bhārater Śakti Sādhana O Śākta Sāhitya* by S. B. Das Gupta (Intro.), p. 6.
by a good number of people under different names.

21. Dutta, A. K. *Bhārata Barsīya Upāsaka Sampradāya*. Vol. II. p. 165.



this that they worship Kālī. The Vāmāchārī Śāktas on the other hand, performed a number of ceremonies known as *Vādāchāra*.²² They did not strictly adhere to vedic-rites. In day-time, they performed ceremonies like ordinary Hindus. But they came in their true colour during the night. It was a completely different picture. In the night, the guru entered the room with eight pairs of male and female worshippers belonging to various castes.²³ The female worshippers generally came from the class of the dancing girls. Brahmin women of ill fame or young milkmaids were preferred for this purpose. In the room, there was either an image of the goddess Kālī or a *Yantra* i. e., diagram which mystically represented the goddess.²⁴ Next the guru made a female worshipper seated by the side of each male disciple. They then entered into discussions on the Tantras. The actual ceremony consisted in partaking the *Panchatattwa* or the *Panchamakār*.* The guru and his disciples exchanged wine among themselves. Unlike the Dakshināchārīs, drinking of wine was considered to be indispensable.²⁵ The Vāmāchārī Śāktas said that *Tantrasāra* had enjoined upon a householder Śakta to take wine and to be in the company of a twelve year old girl.²⁶ They considered their female partners as divine source of energy. Much emphasis was laid on the idea that one must freely indulge in all kinds of sensual pleasures without having any attachment or inhibition. Greed, fear, shame, etc., in a person were regarded as hindrances in the process of their worship. The Vāmāchārī Śakta believed that through the *Panchamakār* Sādhana they would be able to martyr all mental, physical and mundane feelings. After the

22. Ward, W. The History etc. Vol. 1 (Intro.), p. 247.

23. Ibid., pp. 247—249.

24. Farquhar, J. N. *Modern Religious Movement in India*, p. 303.

successful completion of the performance, the guru declared the disciple to be an *abadhūta* or one who had renounced the family life. This mode of sādhanā was very difficult and abounded in pit-falls.

The Vāmāchārīs also performed other revolting practices like *S'ab-Sādhana*.²⁷ They on the full moon night or on the night of the eighth day of the lunar month selected a lonely place for their sādhanā which was generally at the feet of a mountain or jungle or a cremation ground. There the Sādhaka after worshipping Ganesh brought a dead body, which was generally of a young and handsome Chandal, who died by snake bite or by drowning.²⁸ The devotee after rubbing vermilion or sandal-paste on its person placed it on a deerskin. Then he applied a *tilak* (marks of sandal paste) of blood on the forehead and wearing a garland of the skulls sat on the dead body and began his meditation. Some Sādhakas also performed animal sacrifices on that spot.

Besides these practices, another kind of practice known as *Chakra Sādhana* was also performed by the Vāmāchārīs.²⁹ Sometimes the devotees made a group of *Bhairabs* and *Bhairabīs* and painted Sandal-tilaka on their foreheads. The *Bhairabīs* wore red *sāris*, a necklace or *rudrāksha* (rosary beads), rubbed vermilion on the forehead and kept a trident in hand. The Bhairabs then offered meat and wine to the Bhairabīs and worshipped them. They considered the Bhairabīs as incarnations of Kālī. Generally, the wife of a barber or a washer-woman or a milkmaid or a prosti-

25. Dutta, A. K. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 165.

26. Ibid., *Vīrāchar bidhi Bā Panchatattwa Sādhana*, p. 5.

* For the meaning of the word please see Chapter IV Section (d).

27. Dutta, A. K. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 176.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 168.

tute was preferred for the role of the Bhairabīs. These female ascetics were technically known as *Kulakanyā* and the group was known as *Chakra*. The *Tantrasāra* had enjoined that though these women were married to other persons yet during religious ceremonies, the female ascetics should consider those males as their real husbands. During *Sādhana*, they should be as free as a prostitute, but after that neither the male nor the female devotee should have any charm for each other. In the *Chakra*, they place five pots full of wine after properly sanctifying them by mantras. But the Bhairabs were warned not to be addicted to wine. If anyone became intoxicated, he fell down from the standard of a *Vāmāchārī sādhanā*. They were seen in Kalighat in large numbers and many of them were seen in Varanasi and other holy places. This *Vāmāchārī* practice of *S'ab Sādhana* and *Chakra-Sādhana* had been practised by many Tantric-Yogīs earlier. Among them, the name of *Sādhaka Sarbānanda*³⁰ of Rārh Bengal, Purnanandagiri of Mymensingh³¹ and Raghabananda of Dacca³² may be mentioned.

Besides the *Dakshināchārīs* and the *Vāmāchārīs* there were two other groups of *S'āktas*, the *Karārīs* and the *Aghorīs*.³³ The *Karārīs* used to worship *Devi Chāmunda*, who was very popular among the dacoits. The dacoits used to worship Her in dense forests. ⁴ In their worship, they put special stress on human sacrifice, as they believed that the goddess became satisfied by drinking human blood.³⁵

30. Bhattacharjee, S. *Tantra Parichay*, p. 12; Roy, S. *Bhārater Sādhaka*, Vol. 5, pp. 81-100.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Dutta, A. K., op. cit., Vol. II. p. 181.

34. Ward, W. *The History etc.*, Vol. II, p. 151.

35. Wilson, H. H. *The Religious Sects of the Hindus*, p. 147.

The *Aghorīs* worshipped *S'akti* in her most fearful form.³⁶ They used necklace of human bones, never shaved their beard and wandered about in a dizzy mood. They were so indifferent to worldly things that they did not distinguish between sandal paste or stool. It was said that they liked to eat flesh of the dead bodies and they were so powerful that they could re-enliven them through their *sādhana*. The *Aghorīs* and *Karārīs*, however, were few in number.

S'āktaism became popular in Bengal during the seventeenth century³⁷ and it gained greater prominence during the eighteenth century. During this period, we can see several aspects of the cult which influenced almost all the sections of the society. The great political anarchy which ushered in Bengal during the latter half of the eighteenth century involved the people of every rank. To get rid of this misrule, people were in search of a philosophy which could ensure them a secured life. Consequently, *S'āktaism* began to be widely practised in Bengal. At this time, the *S'akti* cult took a degenerate and dangerous form among the *thugs* and robbers.³⁸ They accepted the faith believing that goddess *Kālī* would grant them the necessary strength and power for their profession. The cause of this was not far to seek. When the rural administration of Bengal was slowly passing into the hands of the English and there was great instability in the society, the feeble administration then obtaining in Bengal drove a large mass of peasantry into hopeless despair.³⁹ The uprooted peasantry having no other means of livelihood organised gangs of robbers. The village watchmen of the *Zamindars* of Lower Bengal technically

36. Chakaborty, A. N. *Bhārater S'akti Sādhana*, p. 248.

37. Dasgupta, S. B. op. cit., p.8 (Intro.).

38. Hastings, J. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 6, p. 705.

39. Hunter, W. *Annals of Rural Bengal* pp. 72-73.

known as 'Ghātawāls' also joined their gang.⁴⁰ They established temples of Kālī in the forests and secretly worshipped her in order to derive strength and thus carried on depredations in many parts of the province. It is believed that the temple of Chitres'warī in Chitpur (North Calcutta) was erected by one dacoit, Chite by name.⁴¹ This temple is still existing. *Narabali* or human sacrifice was very popular among them. The reference to human sacrifice at the altar of Devī Chitres'warī⁴² and at the altar of Devī Rankinī⁴³ suggest examples of this type. We also find mention of human sacrifice in the district of Burdwan.⁴⁴ Besides the *thugs* and robbers, Śāktaism also attracted the Hindu Rajas and Dewans, who on one plea or other, whether it had been for non-payment of revenue in time or for any other fault were being oppressed by their muslim masters.* This phenomenon created a sense of inferiority in the minds of Hindu Rajas and Dewans. To overcome their inferiority complex and to acquire power and glory, the

40. Firminger, W. K. *The Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the affairs of the East India Company*, Vol. I (Intro. p. xiviii).

41. Dutta, P. K., "Kalikātār Itibrittwa", *Nabyabhārata*, Kārtik, 1308 B.S., p. 388.

42. Mitra, S. C. "On the Recent Instance of Human Sacrifice," *The Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, Vol. 15, No. 5, p. 481.

43. Ghose, B. *Paschim Vanga Sanskriti*, pp. 357-358.

44. Banerjee, B. N. op. cit., Vol. II, 386.

* The names of Raja Krishna Chandra, Raja Rajballav, Jugat Seth and Maharaja Mahendra can be mentioned in this connection. (Please see *Krishna-Chandar-Royasya-Charitam* by R. L. Mukherjee, pp. 30-40).

A detailed study on this point has been made in Chapter III, section (c).

Hindu Rajas and Dewans took to the worship of Kālī, an incarnation of Śakti. Large sums of money were spent for the making of the image or for its decoration.⁴⁵ One Kalishanker Ghose was distinguished for the number of animal sacrifices performed each year in his house.⁴⁶ So, in course of time, rituals got greater importance whereas meditative aspect of it received lesser importance at their hands.

Among the powerful Zamindars who were worshippers of Kālī, the name of Raja Krishna Chandra of Nadia stands foremost.⁴⁷ He was a great devotee of Śakti and throughout his life, he patronised the Śakti cult.⁺ Nandkishore Roy⁴⁸ and Raghunath Roy (1750—1836), the two sons of Brajakishore Roy, the Dewan of Burdwan were two other prominent Śāktas. Raghunath was made the Dewan, but he could not stick to his job, because he felt no attraction for the worldly life. He passed his time in meditation and in composing songs. His songs reveal the deep yearning of the poet for communion with the deity.

The Raja of Cooch-Behar Harendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur (1783—1839) was a Śākta and a patron of learning.⁵⁰ Under his patronage, *Bramha-Vaivarta Purāna* and *Padmapurāna* were translated into Bengali. He himself composed songs in praise of Kālī.

Maharaja Mahtab Chand (1833—1881) of Burdwan

45. Dutta, P. K. loc. cit., *Nabyabhārata*, Agrahāyan, 1310 B. S.

46. Ibid.

47. Swami Bamdevananda, *Sādhaka Rāmprosād*, pp. 22-23.

48. Chakraborty, J. *Śākta Padmāvali O Śakti, Sāadhanā*, p. 269.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

was a great Sādhaka.⁵¹ He also composed songs on the Ś'akti cult and translated the *mantras* of *Bhadrakālī*, *Adyākālī*, *Mahākālī*, *Triputā* and *Ashtakutā* into Bengali. The Ś'aktas practised it under careful seclusion but the highly intellectual among them, especially in Nadia engaged themselves in the cultivation of the Nyāya philosophy. In course of time, Navadwip became the centre of their philosophical discussion.⁵² From Navadwip, the centres of Nyāya philosophy spread to the different parts of 24-Parganas. Its rapid spread was largely due to the royal patronage it received.* Among the innumerable Pundits, the name of Krishnananda Agambagish deserves to be mentioned first.⁵³

He found that some men for the sake of practising Tāntrika rites used to indulge in immoral activities. Therefore, in order to re-enliven the true spirit of Tantra, he collected the main points of all the Tantras and completed them in a book named '*Tantrasāra*'. Sibchandra Vidyārṇava* of Kumarkhali⁵⁴ and Atal Bihari Ghose⁵⁵ wrote annotations on the Tantra and helped its wide propagation. Another scholar Rasik Mohun Chatterjee of Dacca composed many books on Tantra.⁵⁶ Abhoyram Sarbabhaum of village Jirat in the Hooghly district was a renowned Tāntrika Sādhaka and a great scholar of

51. Ibid., p. 267.

52. *Navadwiper Samkhepa Sāmachār", *Satyārṇava*, January, 1854, pp. 67—68.

53. Sarkar, D. C. Krishnananda Agambagish", *Pravāsi*, Māgh, 1354 B. S., p. 411.

54. Bhattacharjee, S. op. cit., p. 12.

55. Ibid.

*Raja Krishnachandra regularly patronised the Pundits (for the details on this points see *A Statistical Account of Bengal* by W. Hunter, Vol. II, p. 155.

56. Ibid.

Nyāya *Shāstra*.⁵⁷ His son and grandson also followed his religious beliefs. It is interesting to note that the votaries of the cult were mostly upper class householders. The Mukherjee family, one of the leading Zamindars of Maynapara in Birbhum district were famous for the cultivation of Tantra.⁵⁸ The images of Kālī established by them can be seen even today. Some of the Brahmin and Vaidya families of Guptipara in Hooghly districts were Tāntriks. Men not only worshipped the images of Kālī, some of them even composed songs on her different aspects, namely, Kālī as the mother, Kālī as the daughter.

Bharat Chandra, the court poet of Raja Krishna Chandra of Nadia composed the famous poem *Annadamangal*, in which, he after describing the immense power of the goddess expresses all his desires and asks her to fulfil them.⁵⁹ Ramprasad was the greatest Ś'akta poet of the country. He composed innumerable songs in praise of the goddess. In a song, the poet says that he does not hanker after the material gains of life. His heart only longs for worshipping the goddess, which his preceptor had asked him to do. He only requests Her to shower favour on him (the poet) even at the time of death.⁶⁰ In another song, the poet addresses the goddess Kālī as his mother. He says that if he attains Her favour, all his sorrows and anxieties will be removed. He also mentions about the virtue of visiting different

57. Ghose, B. Paschim Vanga etc., p. 541.

58. Ibid., p. 103.

59. Roy, Bharat Chandra, *Annadāmangala*, pp. 104-107

60. Swami Vamdevananda, op. cit., song no. 105 ;

Ganguly, D. N. "Ramprasad, Saint and Poet of Bengal", *National Paper*, September, 1891, p. 444.

* He is well-known for his expositions on the Tantra and Kālī as the protector of the Universe. There was a flood of Ś'akta songs and lyrics in Bengal.

sacred places (*tīrthasthāna*). People think that if one dies in Varanasi, he attains salvation, but he (the poet) does not think so: According to the poet, the worship and meditation of Kālī will bring for him bliss and happiness.⁶¹ In another poem, the poet thinks Kālī to be his daughter. He (the poet) says to Girirāja, the father of Uma, (another name of Kālī) that Śiva is a mendicant and wanders from one cremation ground to another and never takes care of Her. So he will not let Her (Uma) go to Her husband's place, even though people will speak ill of him.⁶² These songs dealing with the coming of Uma to Her father's place are known as *Agamanī sangeet*, which are very popular all over the country. The poet excelled much in these songs and his devotional sentiment was very prominent. Apart from this, we notice another point in his songs. These S'āktas and Vaiṣṇavas were antagonistic to each other at that time and that is why their conflict occupied a prominent place in literature.⁶³ Though Ramprosad was a S'ākta by sect, as a poet he was much influenced by Vaiṣṇava ideas. In many of his songs he has said very nicely that the object of adoration of both the Sāktas and the Vaiṣṇavas is the same, only the way is different; so there should be no cause of conflict.⁶⁴ This attempt at removing conflict and establishing the ultimate identity of different images is the prominent aspect of his songs and it exercised considerable influence on the nineteenth century S'ākta songs. The songs of Ramprosad were so popular that they were sung both by the common people as well as high dignatories of Bengal.

61. Ibid., Song No. 3.

62. Ibid., Song No. 145.

63. Mitra, K. C. "Chaitanva", *Bengal Magazine*, September, 1872, pp.54-55.

64. Gupta, J. *Sādhaka Kabi Rāmprosād*, p. 333.

Mirja Hussain Ali and Sayyid Jafar Khan were two muslim⁶⁵ poets who used to worship Kālī with great pomp, and composed songs in praise of Her.

The cult of S'akti Sādhana in the nineteenth century was a mere continuation of its form in the previous century. The spirit of the cult was almost lost. Vulgarities and debasement in the name of practising the Sādhana had become very common. There are instances to show that persons desirous of fulfilling their sexual urge used to visit centres of Chakra Sādhana during the night.⁶⁶ This kind of debasement became so pronounced that people in general developed a sense of fear and hatred towards the so-called Tāntriks. It caused universal condemnation, which retarded the movement to a great extent. All the same, there was a small group of traditional worshippers of the S'akti cult. Among them, mention may be made of Vamacharan, popularly known as Vāmākshepā.⁶⁷ He was born in 1241 B. S. (1834 A.D.) in a poor Brahmin family of the village Atla in Birbhum district. He was a devotee of the goddess Tārā. Leaving home at a young age he went to Tarapith, (in Birbhum) a well-known Tāntrika-centre. There he attained salvation through rigid Shastric practices.

Aghoribābā was another Tāntrika *abadhuta* of the time. He had little interest in worldly affairs.⁶⁸ He used to remain naked. He practised his *Yoga Sādhana* in the cremation ground of Bakreshwar (in Birbhum). That place later became famous as a centre of Tāntrika culture.

65. Sen, D. C. *Vangabhāsār Itihās*, p. 353.

66. Dutta, M. N. *Rāmkrishner Anudhyāna*, p.8.

67. Ghose, B. Paschim etc. pp. 173-174; Mukhejee, M. R. *Tārā O Vāmākshepā*, p. 8; Roy, S. *Bhārater Sādhaka*, Vol. I, pp. 237-240. According to another report, he was born in 1244 B. S. (1836 A. D.)

68. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 41.

The most illustrious Śakta-Sādhaka of the time was Kamalakanta.⁶⁹ Born in 1179 B. S. (1771 A. D.) in Ambika Kalna, he was brought up in Channa under the care of his maternal uncle. He was initiated under a Vaiṣṇava guru but he practised the Tāntrika practices of Yoga Sādhana and took his wife as his female partner during the Sādhana.⁷⁰ His life is a glaring example of pure shastric sādhana which culminated in attaining *Pūrṇa Siddhi*. He was patronised by the Maharaja of Burdwan and under his direction, he composed a treatise on Tantra named '*Sādhakaranjana*'. In it, he gave an elaborate picture of the Tantric rites and explained the process of invigorating the Kulakundalinī energy.⁷¹

He also emphasised the role of guru in guiding the disciple in conducting the system. Kamalakanta was a true follower of Ramprasad and like him worshipped Kālī as mother of the Universe.⁷² The songs composed by him reflect a heart full of devotion. His devotional songs bear the impression of Vaiṣṇava ideas. In one song, the poet entreates Girirāja (the father of Umā) to bring back Umā who is supposed to have been suffering at the hands of Mahādeva, who cares nothing for Her and wanders from place to place.⁷³ In another song, Kamalakanta expresses his joy at the news of the coming of Gourī (another name of the goddess). He describes how warmly the people are welcoming Her. This song earned him great popularity. These Śakta songs were technically known as *Malsī gāna*.⁷⁴ During this period, Kabi-wālās and *Pāṃchālīkār*s, (composer of *Pāṃchālī* songs) also

69. Gupta, J. *Sādhaka Kamalakanta*, p. 10.

70. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

71. Kamalakanta, *Sādhakaranjana*, pp. 4-6.

72. Gupta, J. op. cit., p. 107.

73. Ibid., p. 181.

74. Ibid., p. 182 ; Sen K. M. *Bāṅglār Sādhana*, p. 32.

popularised the Śakti cult through their Śakti Sādhana. These poets were not exclusively Vaiṣṇava or Śakta but they composed poems on both the cults. Though their poems and songs are not of a very high order still they became popular among the masses. Among those poets mention may be made of Antony Feringee, who was a Portuguese by birth, and had settled in Calcutta since his childhood.⁷⁵ He used to follow Hindu ways of life and regularly joined the Durgāpujā. His songs reveal a heart fully dedicated to the mother goddess.⁷⁶ Dasarathi Roy was another reputed *Pāṃchālīkār* of the time. He wrote on the universal nature of God.⁷⁷ According to him, there is only one God, but man, because of ignorance, gives Him different names like, 'Kālī, Brahmā', Govinda, etc. In his opinion, only the *Pancha-Upāsaka* or the worshippers of *Pancha-makāra* can attain Him. He felt that the quarrel between the Śaktas and Vaiṣṇavas was because of the fact that they did not understand the proper meaning of religion.⁷⁸ Ram Vasu wrote many good poems on Bhawānī. In his songs, he praises Śakti and Her overwhelming power of removing all miseries of the world.⁷⁹ His *āgamanī* songs reflect the poet's longing for bringing back Umā to her Father's home. The Kabiwālās were mostly illiterate having very little knowledge of the Shastric religion. But from the experience of life they had realised unity in diversity. It was this

75. Chakraborty, N. *Unabins'a S'atābdīr Kābiwālā O Bāṅglā Sāhitya*, p. 91.

76. Dev, A. K. *Vanger Kabitā*, Vol. II., p. 397.

77. *Dāsu-Rāyer Pāṃchālī*, p. 608.

78. Chakraborty, H. *Dāsarathi O Tānhār Pāṃchālī*, p. 423.

79. Chakraborty, N. op. cit., p. 67
(Santal Pargana). He composed 'Gourīmangal' in 1806. The poem began with a hymn to the mother of Universe.

aspect that found expression in their songs. They tried to bring about harmony and adjustment between apparently divergent thoughts. The work of religious harmony was carried out by another poet, Raja Prithwi Chandra of Pakur. The poet elaborately dealt with the aims and processes of Tāntrik Yoga-Sādhana.⁸⁰ The marriage episode of Gaurī was described with all vividness.⁸¹ Though a Śākta, he revolted strongly against animal-sacrifice⁸² and devoted a great portion of his poem in describing Krishna-līlā.⁸³ Like a devoted Vaiṣṇava, he related the birth of Krishna, his boyhood, his sports with the *gopinīs*, etc. It indicated that Prithwi Chandra was not very sectarian in outlook and was interested in showing the unity of godheads. The influence of these poets was far-reaching. They moulded the course of Bengali literature to a great extent. They left a deep impression upon the Bengali literature as a whole.

The main works of the kabiwālās was to sow the seed of harmony between the two apparently antagonistic cults, viz., Śāktaism and Vaiṣṇavism. They tried to reconcile the two different cults. Kālī and Krishna were identical to them.

In the early years of the nineteenth century the Christian missionaries were very active and they strongly pleaded that human sacrifice at the altar of Kālī should be immediately stopped, as this inhuman practice destroyed a good number of lives every year.⁸⁴ Moreover, it was an obnoxious scene created for religious purpose. They pointed

80. Prithwichandra, *Gourīmangala*, p. 156.

81. Ibid., pp. 13—20.

82. Ibid., p. 94.

83. Ibid., pp. 48—93.

84. "On Infanticide and Human Sacrifices in India", *Asiatic Journal*, Vol. 14, 1:22 ;
Mitra, S. K. *Hooghly Jelār Itihāsa*. p. 198

out that the priestly influence was responsible for the large number of human sacrifices in and about Burdwan.⁸⁵ The criticism of the missionaries got support from the saner section of the society. Because of their joint efforts many of the horrid practices disappeared.

(c) Durgapūjā and Jagadhātrī Pūjā.

Durgā pūjā is a very old festival of the Hindus. It is celebrated throughout India* and is especially popular in Bengal, where it is performed with strict shastric rites. Durgā is worshipped as the Goddess of strength, remover of all evils and protector of the whole universe. She is regarded as the wife of Śiva, hence the name *Bhawānī* is justly applied to her. She has ten arms; in one of her right hands is a spear, and in one of the left hands the tail of a serpent. Under the right leg leans a lion and under the left, the sitting gaint. The bright half of the lunar year is particularly devoted to Durgā. The pūjā continues for five consecutive days. On the *Sasthī* (sixth lunar day) or the first day of the pūjā, the image is placed on an elevated seat and is enlivened by popular rituals. She is then placed in a bower formed of nine plants of which *bilwa* (wood apple) is the most important. The seventh, eighth and ninth are the great days; on the eighth and ninth, animals are sacrificed for her propitiation, and on the last day, the image is reverentially consigned to the river¹. This day is known as *Dasahara*. With this ends the great festival of the Hindus.

85. *The Calcutta Christian Observer*, February, 1838, p. 120.

1. Parkes, F. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 34.

* In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Durgā is worshipped under the name of *Devī pūjā*, and the festival is known as *Dasaharā*.

Lotus is the important flower in this worship and it is said that Devī Durgā does not accept the prayer without it. People believe that the tenth day or *Vijayā Das'ami* is a day of universal merriment when people forgetting their sorrows and anxieties exchange greetings with each other. On this occasion, universal holiday is observed in Bengal.² People from distant parts of the country rejoin their families and the *pūjā* is observed in almost all the houses of the Bengalees. This festival has been popular especially because of the fact that Ramchandra worshipped Durgā to win over Ravana, and since that time the *pūjā* is observed in Bengal.

But from the last quarter of the eighteenth century this festival was observed in such a way which made it public rather than a private festival. Religious ceremony became more an occasion of the social gathering which was celebrated on a princely scale.³ The wealthy spent a large sum on this celebration which provided an opportunity to show off their wealth and influence. All kinds of vulgarity were exhibited during this celebration. The patrons spent a large amount of money on its celebration not because of any religious feeling but because of a sense of competition with the other patrons. This *pūjā* was celebrated with great pomp in the houses of Maharaja Nabakissen and Raja Krishna Chandra of Nadia, who is said to be the innovator of this exhibition of wealth. Naba Kissen also spent several thousand rupees on this occasion.⁴ The entire house was gorgeously decorated; the great hall in which the image was placed was richly furnished and the whole house was decently lighted. The dancing halls were beautified by lustrous wall-sheds, flowers, chairs and cushions. The

2. Murdoch. J. op. cit., p. 63.

3. Ghose, N. N. *Memoirs of Maharaja Nabakissen*, p. 178.

4. Ibid., p. 177; *Friend of India* 1822, Vol. V, pp. 317—318.

Rajas, Dewans and the big Zamindars of the province were invited to it. Clive and Hastings were regular visitors to his house.⁵ Everywhere there was gaiety and merriment. English bands and music delighted the guests. The magnanimity and charity of Raja Raj Krishna of Calcutta is also well-known. He used to spend not less than fifteen thousand rupees every year on this festival.⁶ Brahmins were invited from all parts of India and they were each presented with a garment and three rupees in cash. One hundred and eight Brahmins who performed the *Chandī-pātha* (Recitation of the Chandī) were each presented with a gold *mohur* (gold coin).

Another example of extravagance was to be found in the house of Raja Kali Shanker Ghose.⁷ One hundred and eight goats, sixty buffaloes and twenty rams were annually sacrificed in his house. A large crowd assembled to witness this offering of sacrifice to Devī Durgā. The *Navami* was the day especially fixed for the *balidān* (sacrifice). A large number of sacrifices were also made in the house of Raja Jai Mittra.⁸ After the sacrificing ceremony was over, people applied on their person blood of the dead animals and went out to the street in procession singing obscene songs.

We have a report of 1851, in which we find that Babu Rammohun Mullick assembled a good number of Brahmins on the day of *Navami* at the *pūjāmandap* (hall, where the *pūjā* is held) which was uncommonly illumined.⁹ The Babu presented a gold necklace and some utensils to each Brahmin and to others, he offered a pair of bangles.

5. Mukherjee, H. *Kalikātā Ekāler O Sekāler*. p. 709.

6. "Durgā Pūjā", *Friend of India* 1820. Vol. 4 (Monthly Series), pp. 125—126.

7. Seth, H. *Prāchīn Kalikātā Parichay*, p. 235;

Ward, W. *The History etc.*, Vol. I. p. 154.

8. Seth, H. *Prāchīn Kalikātā etc.*, p. 232.

9. *Samvādapūrṇachandrodaya*, Aswin 30, 1259 B. S., p. 2.

In another report published in the *Samvādapūrṇachandrodaya* of the 26th September, 1965, we find on the occasion of Durgā pūjā, Bholanath Mullick not only arranged for grand feasts and dance-shows but also presented every Brahmin one decent pair of cloth and four rupees in cash.¹⁰

The Zamindars spent large sums on this celebration and sometimes they even misused the public property. The case of Raja Sukhomoy Roy may be mentioned in this connection. He arranged for such an entertainment where "an attempt was made to introduce some English tunes with Hindoostanee music."¹¹

Others who accumulated huge money during the early British period also followed their example. When the British established their sway in Bengal, the revenue administration of Bengal also came in their hands. But as they were ignorant of the revenue system of the country they had to appoint Indians of social standing as banians, gomastas, and dewans to manage the work of revenue collection. These Indians were known as Babus and served as intermediaries between the Indian peasantry and the European administrators. They collected taxes more ruthlessly and were more oppressive than their European masters. They collected revenue not only to meet the demands of the state but also for filling their own coffers. Maharaja Naba Kissen of Sobha bazar acted as the dewan of Clive.¹² Maharaja Sukhomoy Roy was the chief Munshi of Clive.¹³ Ganga Govinda Singh served as a dewan to

10. Extract from *Samvādpūrṇachandrodaya* quoted in *Subranbanik Kathā O Kīrti* by N. N. Laha, Vov. II. p. 26.

11. *The Calcuttā Chronicle*, September 18, 1792.

12. Ghose, N. N. op. cit., p. 177.

13. Chatterjee, B. B. *A short Sketch of Maharaja Sukhomoy Roy Bahndur*, p. 12.

Warren Hastings.¹⁴ His name was a terror to the peasants. Hridayaram Banerjee and Darpanarayan Tagore were the other banians of the Company's servants.¹⁵ All these men amassed large fortunes by their association with Englishmen. With some knowledge of English which enabled them to come in close contact with the European servants of the Company, they sometimes became partners in trading concerns of the European merchants. The East India Company conferred on them the titles of Rajas and Zamindars. Thus we find that a new class grew up by the end of the eighteenth century which tried to imbibe the Western culture. Mention may be made of the families of the Lahas, Mullicks and Seths.¹⁶ They gave financial assistance to many schools and colleges and thus fostered culture and learning. They, however, spent their money not only on benevolent activities, but also showed off their wealth on occasions like Durgāpūjā and other festivals. They wasted large amounts of money on merry-making. We get a description of such a display of wealth published in the *Asiatic Journal* of August, 1826.¹⁷ On the occasion of the Durgā pūjā, the wealthy gentlemen of Calcutta offered reception to every class of inhabitants. They celebrated the pūjā "with all the usual concomitants of clamour, tinsel and glare."¹⁸ Singers like Nicky, Ashroom and Zeenut performed excellent music in the houses of Nil Mani Mullick and Raja Ramchandra.¹⁹ Babu Rupchand,

14. Sen, C. C. "Dewan—Ganga Govinda Singh" *Navya-bhārat*, Chaitra, 1292 B. S., p. 549.

15. Bhattacharjee, D. *Vāṅglā Charit Sāhitya*, p. 43.

16. Ghose, B. "Vāṅglār Vidwat Samāj" *Chaturanga*, Kartik, 1362 B. S., pp. 191—192.

17. *Asiatic Journal* quoted in *Samvād patre Sekāler Kathā* by B. N. Banerjee, Vol. I p. 93.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

Gopi Mohan Deb, Gopi Mohan Thakur, Budar Nath Babur arranged for all these entertainments regularly.²⁰

The conversion of religious festival into a social gathering gave encouragement to extravagance and debauchery. The Durgāpūjā festival in those days exemplified the misuse of wealth and almost all the sections of society derived enjoyment out of it. Singing and dancing in front of image, the use of *Siddhi* (hemp) by all men and women on the last night of the festival, and the hiring of dancing girls who were presented with rich costumes by the patrons greatly affected the morality of the people.²¹ The dances of the girls assumed greater importance than the worship of the Durgā. Roy Raj Krishna of Calcutta spent Rs.4,000/-on the hiring of girls.²² The famous dancing girl of Calcutta, Nicky, was a frequent invitee to these celebrations.²³ Dances were also arranged at the house of Ashutosh Dev of Sobha Bazar and Babu Raj Krishna Singh.²⁴ Radhakanta Dev, Swarup Mullick and Motilal Seal arranged for English dramas, dances and French magical shows for the amusement of ordinary guests.²⁵ The merriment continued for days together. Not only the Babus but the Europeans also took great delight in the company of beautiful maidens. The Babus felt highly gratified when they found that these dance rituals had pleased their European guests.

Forgetting all religious prejudices they introduced beef and brandy for further entertainment of their European friends. It is said that the people became so corrupt that

20. Ibid.

21. Parkes, F. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 34.

22. Loc. cit., *Friend of India*, 1820, Vol. 4. (Monthly series), pp. 125-127.

23. Parkes, F. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 34.

24. "The unobstructed celebration of the Puja", *Samāchār Darpan*, October 29, 1831,

25. *Samāchār Chandrikā*, November, 1849.

they did the meanest thing for a bottle of champagne. They sold their morality and ethical sense for obtaining material prosperity. At that time, it was a matter of great pride if any European of high rank visited the house of an Indian. This association with the ruling class materially helped the upper middle class, but we do not know how much it benefited the poor people. The lower middle class did not oppose it. They were contented by participating in it and remained silent at the gross abuse of money.

These clearly reveal how much the wealthy class was desirous of establishing contact with the ruling class and how soon they imbibed drinking habits of their European friends. Other social vices also received encouragement. J.Z. Holwell has described this festival as "the grand general feast of the gentoos",²⁶ where the cultured foreigners and rich Indians associated themselves in a grotesque manner. The Christian missionaries of the nineteenth century, however, were vehemently critical of this attitude of the Babus. They were against it as they felt that hiring of girls and public drinking encouraged prostitution.²⁷

At a time when the great famine of 1770 had taken toll of nearly one-fourth of the population of the province²⁸ and the Company's servants were relentlessly collecting the revenue with rigour,²⁹ these Zamindars did not hesitate in wasting large sums of money on amusements during the pūjā. True it is, that the introduction of amusements in the pūjā relegated the religious aspect of the festival into the background, but this was not always the case. Raja

26 Holwell, J. Z. *Interesting Historical Events*, Part II, p. 128

27 "Doorgāpūjā", *Friend of India*, October 4, 1838 (Weekly), p. 549.

28 Hunter, W. *Annals of Rural Bengal*, p. 56

29 Roy, K. C. op. cit., pp 13-15; Ghose, B op. cit. Vol II, pp 113-115

Naba Kissen was one of those who tried to maintain the religious sanctity of the *pūjā*.³⁰ He himself took personal care to see that the *pūjā* was performed according to proper shastric rites.

B. N. Banerjee is of the opinion that this outburst of exuberance and extravagance on the part of the Babus was because of the fact that the establishment of British rule in Bengal brought peace and order to the country and the Zamindars did not feel frightened to make a public display of their wealth.³¹ This display of licentiousness and splendour of the new Zamindar class of Bengal may be compared with the "unquestioning snobbery" of the English aristocrats in the beginning of the nineteenth century.³²

Jagadhatri puja

Jagadhātrī is the other name of Durga. The *pūjā* is held on the *navami* (the ninth day of a lunar fortnight) of the bright half of the month of *Agrahāyan* (November-December). On that day, an image of Jagadhātrī is placed for public worship. In the image she is shown riding a lion and grasping in Her four hands a conch, a disc, a water lily, and a club. The image is generally of unusual height and looks elegant. The image in Chandernagore and Chinsurah were most remarkable.³³ Up to the last decade of the eighteenth century the *pūjā* used to be celebrated for three days.

By the second half of the eighteenth century the *pūjā* had become popular and it was celebrated throughout Bengal with strict shastric injunctions.³⁴ From Chin-

30 Ghose, N. N. op. cit., p 177

31 Banerjee, B. N. op. cit., Vol. I (Intro) p. xii

32 Bryant, A. *The Age of Elegance*, p 260

33 Mitra, S. K. *Hooghly Jelār Itihās O Vanga Samāj*. Vol. I, p. 566; Banerjee, B. N. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 385.

34 Murdoch, J. op. cit., p. 62.

surah, it came down to Calcutta and 24 Parganas. The new Zamindar class of Bengal spent large sums of money on this *pūjā* also. Among them, mention may be made of Raja Krishna Chandra Roy of Nadia, Jagath Seth, the great banker, and Raja Rajballav of Dacca.³⁵ The Babus used to distribute utensils, *silken dhotiis* (long piece of cloth worn round the loins by males) *Shawls* (woolen wrapper) and money to the Brahmins.³⁶ A large number of Brahmins from outside Bengal used to visit the place on the occasion of the *pūjā*. It is said that many families made themselves opulent out of the gifts received during this festival. The Babus not only spent large sums of money in distributing gifts to the Brahmins but they also arranged for obscene *Jātrās* (stage play) and *Pāñchālī* songs which became the main attractions of the *pūjā*. Large sums of money were also spent on drinking and dances for which *byjees* (professional dancing girls) were hired from different parts of India. It was an age* when literature and language were not patronised and people took delight in *Kabigān* (light song in the form of question and answer) and *Hap-akdai*.⁺ The common men having no other means of re-

35. Sinha, K. *Hutom Penchār Nakshā*, p. 14.

36. On the present celebration of the Hindoo Poojas", *Friend of India*, 1820, May, Vol. 3, p. 129.

37. De, S. K. *History of the Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 306.

* For the greater details of this age see *Hutom Penchār Nakshā* by Kaliprasanna, Sinha, pp. 4, 6, 8 and 14.

+ Hap-akdai—It is a kind of song composed of few lines and generally dealing with social problems. Like Kabi songs, we hear of the existence of disputants or two opposing parties who took up of different aspects of a particular theme and replied to each other in song. This song was marked by a vulgar tone. The wealthy people patronised these songs, and it was popular among all sections of people.

laxation indulged in these vulgarities. Caricature song was a very popular form of entertainment which formed the main item of the *pūjā* festival.³⁸

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, some new features were brought about in the *pūjā*, the most important of which was the *bārowāree* system of *pūjā* or participation of the whole community in its celebration. It is said that the *bārowāree* *pūjā* system originated during the time of pestilence which overtook Bengal villages in the second half the eighteenth century.³⁹ On that occasion the Brahmins of Guptipara (near Shantipur) had formed an association of twelve persons for the celebration of this *pūjā* and raised subscriptions from several villages for meeting the cost of the *pūjā*.⁴⁰ It is said that they collected about seven thousand rupees from public subscription and celebrated the *pūjā* with great eclat.⁴¹ This system of performing the *pūjā* by public subscription became prevalent in course of time in Calcutta, 24 Parganas and Hooghly. From that time onward the *pūjā* came to be known as *Bārowāree pūjā*.

The other feature, that is the reduction in the duration of the shastric *pūjā* from three days to one day also came in about the same time. This was probably because of the grave economic crisis with which Bengal was faced, after the great famine of 1770. Raja Krishna Chandra of Nadia is credited to have brought about this innovation in 1790 in the form of the *pūjā*.⁴² As is very well-known, Raja Krishna Chandra was a very wreckless and extravagant man. Because of this extravagance, he failed to pay the revenue due to the

38. Sinha, K. P. op. cit., p. 14.

39. Hunter, W. W. *Annals of Bengal*, p. 19.

40. Loc cit, *Friend of India*, 1820, May, pp 129-130

41. Ibid.

42. Mitra, S. K, op cit., Vol. I, p 551

Government.⁴³ He was therefore put in prison. It is said that while in prison he dreamt a dream in which Devī Durga asked him to shorten the duration of the *pūjā* from three days to one day, which would reduce his expense and enable him to tide over the difficulties. From that time onwards, *pūjā* is performed in one day only all over Bengal. Durga *pūjā* as then celebrated in Bengal was a very expensive and time-taking festival. It was beyond the means of the common people to organise the *pūjā*. And so they observed Jagadhātrī *pūjā* to satisfy their religious sentiments. Jagadhātrī *pūjā* gained popularity in Bengal because of the participation of common people in it. It became so popular that the repeated attempts of the Christian missionaries to stop this *pūjā* proved futile.⁴⁴

(f) Satyanārāyaṇa—Satyapir

The worship of Satyanārāyaṇa is very old in the Hindu society. The earliest mention of Satyanārāyaṇa is found in the chapter on Revakhanda of the Skandapurāṇa. The Hindus worship him as the remover of all evils and promoter of material prosperity. He brings good luck and new child into a family.¹ All classes of the Hindus adore him in order to achieve these ends. The evening of a full-moon day is reserved for his worship, and the Brahmins usually act as priests. The deity is represented by a wooden stool, encircled by few loops, called *mokams* and the posts at each corner called *tir*.² People offer *sirni*, which is made of milk, flour, molasses and banana, each weighing five *powās* (a quarter of a seer), betel leaves and betel nuts,

43. Mukherjee, H., *Kalikātā Ekāler O Sekāler*, p 619

44. *Samvādapurnāchandrodaya*, Kātrik 20, 1258 B. S., p. 3.

1. Mitra, S.C. *On the worship of the deity Satyanārāyaṇa in North Bengal*, p. 789.

2. O'Malley, L. S. S. *Bengal District Gazetteers* (Howrah), p. 46.

each five in numbers.³ Sweets are also offered. Some people place a picture of Nārāyaṇa or the *Nārāyaṇasilā* (black stone representing Nārāyaṇa) on the stool and worship it. After the performance of the pūjā, the priest narrates the story of Sankhapati merchant⁴ or Brahmin Harisharmā.⁵ The story of a woodman obtaining immense wealth through the worship of Satyanārāyaṇa is also narrated.⁶ All these stories glorify his supernatural powers of curing diseases, restoring life, and of ensuring peace and prosperity to the family.

After the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal, the Hindus and the Muslims came in close contact with one another. The contact had its effect on the Satyanārāyaṇa pūjā, and we find some urdu words like *Sirni* being used in the pūjā. There was no image of the god at some places which also suggests impact of Islam on it.

During the eighteenth century, and the first half of the nineteenth, many stories in praise of his greatness were written in verse. One such story* was written by Rameshwar Chakraborty.

This pūjā had a great social value as it promoted friendly feelings between the neighbours. In this pūjā, the householder had to invite all sections of the society and had to distribute *prasads* (food offered to the god) among them.

3. Brahmchari, A. "Satyapirer Pāmchālī," *Sāhitya Parishad Patrika* "13 19 B. S. Nos. 2.

4. Sanyal, B. "Satyanārāyaṇer Pāmchālī" *Sāhitya Parishad Patrika* 1308 B. S. Nos. 3.

5. Mustafi, B. "Satyanārāyaṇ Kathā," *Sāhitya Parishad Patrika* 1908 B. S. No. 1.

6. Sanyal, B. loc. cit., *Sāhitya Parishad Patrika* 1308 B. S. Nos. 3.

* The story of Vishnusharma is depicted in *Satyanārāyaṇer Brata Kathā*.

The Satyanārāyaṇa pūjā was prevalent throughout India except Madras.⁷ The cause of its popularity lay in the fact that man in order to get relief from the sufferings of life began to worship Satyanārāyaṇa and some other godlings, like mangalachandī, Bisahari and Śitalā.*⁸ These gods were outside the precincts of Shastric injunctions and were most popular among the lowest strata of society. It is not known how much influence the Satyanārāyaṇa pūjā exerted on the higher sections of the society but this much is sure that it was quite popular among the people at large.

The low-class muslims also took part in the Satyanārāyaṇa pūjā, and other religious festivals of the Hindus.⁹ As a result, they gradually assimilated many of the Hindu-practices. Thus we find very little difference in the religious ideas of the Hindu and the Muslims at a certain level. The muslim influence also infiltrated into the Hindu society through the preachings of some muslim-Fakirs, who were known as Pirs. These Pirs wielded religious as well as administrative authority and were popular both among the Hindus and Muslims. There were innumerable Pirs and Gāzis in Bengal, amongst whom Gyasuddin, Samasuddin, Sikander, Gazi and Kalu were most renowned.¹⁰ They were collectively known as *Panch-pirs*.

7. Gupta, N. N. (Ed.) *Satyapirer Kathā* (Introduction), p. 7.

8. Bhattacharya, S. (Ed.) *Ś'ibāyan* (Introduction), P. 13.

9. Gupta, N. N. (Ed.) op. cit., p. 14 and 15.

10. Gait, "Notes on some famous Pirs", *Census of India*, 1901, Vol. 6, p. 180 ;

Mitra, S. K. *Jessore Khulnār Itihās*, Vol. 1, p. 376.

*Mangalachandī represents the goddess Śakti.

Bisahari - the goddess of snakes, same as manasā.

Śitalā—goddess of small pox. All of them were very popular in Bengal.

In some of the villages, under a banyan tree, mounds are seen with five crests on them. It represents the *Panch-pir*.¹¹ People worshipped there if any vow had been registered previously. These *Gāzis* were regarded as the Spiritual guide of Kings. Because of their spiritual position, they also exerted some influence on the administration of the country. They wore long black *alkhālāh* (loose garment upto the ankle), a long cap, used shackles of iron, and long iron tongues.¹² As they lived in the Sunderban area, they gained great importance among the boatmen of that locality.¹³ They sometimes maintained their own boats. They did not take meat and fish and observed celibacy. When a holy Pir passed away, a tomb was erected in his memory and people offered their homage to the departed soul. One such tomb or *dargāh* exists even today in the village of Subarnagram.¹⁴ The tombs of these saints became a place of pilgrimage and people visited the places for curing diseases.

There were also Pirs in the other districts of Bengal. The Pirs of Mymensingh, Khulna and Dinajpore were quite famous, and they wielded considerable influence on the people of their district. In Mymensingh, Miskim Shah was a famous Pir, near whose tomb an annual fair was held.¹⁵ The shrine of Pir Shahansha at Atia was also a place of pilgrimage.¹⁶ In Khulna, Gazi Saheb and Kalu exerted so much influence that they were venerated both by the

Hindus and the Muslims alike.¹⁷ Woodcutters and cultivators of the Sunderban area used to utter their names before entering forests or starting cultivation in the lands.

It was believed that the Pirs possessed the power of warding off the tigers and crocodiles, which caused a number of casualties every year. The Pirs were equally popular among the boatmen, who never set out on journey without offering prayers to the Pirs. In the district of Jessore, Manik Pir was held in high esteem. He was regarded as the god of the Cowherd.¹⁸ After the birth of a calf, songs were sung in honour of Manik Pir. One of the characteristics of the associates of Manik Pir was that they begged only for milk. In 24 parganas, Bar Khan Gazi¹⁹ and Jafar Khan Gazi²⁰ were famous. The latter waged war with the Hindu Kings of Tribeni and Saptagram for the propagation of Islam. In this war, Jafar Khan became victorious by killing King Bhudeb. Thus we find, the Pirs and Gazis taking recourse to force to convert people to Islam.

Auliyas, were another set of Muslim saints, but unlike the Gazis, they did not believe in forcible conversion.²¹ Therefore, some scholars feel that the Auliyas were better cultural ambassadors of Islam.

Songs, known as Gazi-songs were composed in praise of the Gazis or Pirs. They were as popular as the boat races that took place after *Mansāpūjā*.* Many of these songs

11. Suchase, F. A. *Bengal District Gazetteers*, (Mymensingh), p. 36 ;
Lamhourne, G. E. op.cit., (Malda), p. 29.
12. Strong, F.W. op.cit., (Dinajpur), p.38.
13. O' Malley, L. S. S. op.cit., (Khulna), pp. 61-62.
14. Mitra, S. K. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 376.
15. Suchase, F. A. op. cit., (Mymensingh), p. 38.
16. Ibid.

17. O' Malley, L. S. S. op. cit., (Khulna), p. 64 ; Gait, loc. cit., *Census of India 1901*, Vol. 6, p. 180.
18. Roychaudhury, N.N. "Madhya Vange Grāmya Gīti", *Basumati*, Agrabāyan, 1337 B. S.
19. Goswami, M.M. *Roy Gunākār Bhāratchandra*, p. 165.
20. Ghose, B. *Paschim Vanga Sanskriti*, p. 483.
21. Mitra, S.K. op. cit., Vol.I, p. 376.

* *Manasā* is the goddess of Snakes.

The boat racing was so popular in Bengal, that it

bear testimony to the influence of *Padāvalī-Kirtans* (songs composed describing the different aspects of Krishna's life) of the Vaiṣṇavas on them.²² Those who sang these, kept a *Chāmar* (fly brush) in their hands which they swang while singing. Some of the poems glorified Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.²³ The Gazi maintained a band of singers, comprising both the *namas'ūdras* (low caste Hindu whose duty is to serve the Brahmins) and Muslims.²⁴ The main singer among them was technically known as 'Khora'. He used violin and *mridanga*, (an egg-shaped drum) the use of which indicated Vaiṣṇava-influence.²⁵ In Bengal, many fairs were held in honour of Pirs and Gazis, which were known as *Pirer melā* or *Gāzi Sāheber melā*. Kalisuri and Kalaskati fairs were held in Bakarganj district²⁶ (now in East Bengal). It is interesting to note that the persons who sang the Gazi-songs were mostly the sellers of *Rādhā-Krishna pot* (earthen plate on which the images of Rādhā-Krishna are carved).

Thus it can be said that although the Pirs and Gazis were Muslims, their religious ideas did not differ materially from those of the Hindus. The influence of the Pirs on Hindu minds was more because of the patronage given by the different Kings to the study of Hindu religious text. The Muslim rulers of Bengal appointed scholars to translate the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata from Sanskrit into Bengali.²⁷ Many other Hindu poets were patronised by

was not only arranged in case of Manasāpūjā, but some people liked to arrange it after the Durgāpūjā also.

22. Ibid., Vol II, p. 866.

23. Song collected from Kasem Ali, 24 Parganas.

24. Mitra, S.K. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 866.

25. Ibid.

26. Jact, J.C. *Bengal District Gazetteers* (Bakarganj), p. 37.

27. Tarachand, *Influence of Islam in Indian Culture*, p. 241.

the Muslim Kings. During the time of Hussain Shah (1493-1519) this goodwill was further increased.²⁸ Hussain Shah had great regard for the Hindus and he appointed them to high posts. Gopinath Vasu²⁹ was the commander of his forces and Mukunda Das his personal physician.³⁰ These instances show that Hindus and Muslims lived in close friendship.

Because of this cordiality between the two communities, a new god came into being, which came to be known as Satyapir.³¹ It was the combination of the Hindu god Satyanārāyaṇa and Muslim pirs. It began to be equally venerated by both the Hindus and the Muslims. The Satyapir became extremely popular among the low class people. The philosophy of the Vedas was abstruse for them. The cult of Satyapir offered them a simplified and practical philosophy. There were some other reasons for the acceptance of Satyapir by the Hindus. The repressed Hindus in the Muslim-dominated society in order to save their Hindu god gave him a new garb and designated him as Satyapir. Moreover, Islam being the religion of the ruling race, naturally cast an enormous influence on the common people. The Hindus found it convenient and profitable to align with the ruling race. The anxiety of the Muslim rulers to win the support of the Hindus also facilitated the emergence of Satyapir as god and its acceptance by the Muslim-community. Tarachand rightly remarks that Hussain Shah was the originator of Satyapir.³²

28. Sarkar, J.N. *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, pp. 151-153; Vasu, N.N. *Vanger Jātiya Itihās* (Brahman Kanda), p. 193.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Brahmachari, A. loc. cit., *Sāhitya Parishad Patrika* 1319 B. S. Nos. 2; Braverly, *Report of the Census of Bengal 1872*, p. 133.

32. Tarachand, op. cit., p. 217.

The origin of Satyapir can be traced as far back as the sixteenth century. It was in an embryonic form in 'Sekh-Suvodaya; *³³ The poet of 'Satyapirer Kathā' unhesitatingly declared that the identity of Satyapir and Satyanārāyana was the same.³⁴ He showed that there was no difference between the Korān and the Purāṇa; Rāma and Rahim were equally esteemed. Satyapir was promoted to the rank of Nārāyana and we see a Brahmin worshipping the Pir.³⁵ The influence of Satyapir was strongly felt in the districts of Burdwan and Midnapore.³⁶ The popularity of Satyapir in this period is proved by the fact that several poets composed poems glorifying his activity and most of them belonged to the Burdwan district. Among them mention may be made of Guṇanidhi Chakrabartty, Dwija Sibcharaṇa Rāmabhadra and Kabi Krishṇakānta.³⁷ In their poems Satyapir has been designated as *Abadhuta*. In other places, he is depicted as Krishna of Kaliyuga (Dark Age.)

During the nineteenth century, many *Fakirs* singing the *Pāmchālī* (versified stories) often mention the name of Lakshṇāpūjā and mixed up Nārāyaṇapūjā and Pīrpūjā.³⁸ Though Muslim by religion, they often glorified the Hindu way of living and Hindu social customs. It was due to

these *Fakirs* that Satyapir became widely popular in Bengal.

This admixture of two religions not only promoted good feeling between the two communities, but it also produced a direct result. The Pathans succeeded in converting many Hindus, who became known as *Nasyas**. Some Hindus embraced Islam in order to please their muslim rulers, while some embraced it because of their fascination for the Muslim religion, which proclaims the equality of all men. A number of respectable families became converts to Islam. It is said that some of the prominent families of the time had Muslim origin. The Susung** family of Mymensingh professed the Islamic faith.³⁹ The inhabitants of the Dinajpore district who were originally *Rājbanis** became converts to Islam.⁴⁰ Other converts were the illegal children of foreign-troops. For few generations, these converts could not gain any social prestige; some of them were socially and culturally degraded. The cult of Satyapir offered them a golden opportunity. In it, their religious sentiments got proper nourishment and that is why this cult became especially popular among the converts.

The converts could not give up their old religious habits altogether; many Hindu customs and rituals came with them into the Muslim society and were assimilated by them. Many of the Muslims used to attend the Durgā Pūjā,⁴¹ and fixed the wedding dances of their wards after duly consulting

33. Goswami, M.M. op. cit., p. 164.

* Some poems of the book are composed in appreciation of the Pirs. These are regarded to be the earliest references to the Pirs of Bengal.

34. Bhattacharjee, R. op. cit., (Introduction), pp. 2-7; Ayodhyaram, *Sri Sri Satya Nārāyaṇer Brata Kathā*, (Introduction), pp. 2-3.

35. Brahmachari, A. loc. cit., *Sāhitya Parishad Patrika* 1319 B. S. Nos. 2.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Song collected from Kasem Ali, 24 Parganas; Chakraborty, R. op. cit., p. 14

* One whose original religion is lost. It is said that conversions began from the time of Alauddin, 14th Century A. D.

** The Zamindar family of Mymensingh.

39. Suchase, F. A. *Bengal District Gazetteers* Mymensingh, y. 36.

40. Strong, F.N. op. cit., (Dinajpore), p. 36.

41. Suchase, F.A. op. cit. (Mymensingh), pp. 36-38.

Hindu astrologers.⁴² The Muslims joined the Manasāpūjā boat races, and the Hindus often took part in the Muharram festival.⁴³ Many of the Muslims liked to wear new dresses on the day of the Durgāpūjā and many Hindus regularly visited the mosque after winning a legal suit.⁴⁴ The Muslims of Netrokona in Tangail sub-division gave up the practices of circumcision.⁴⁵ Thus the intimacy between the two communities helped to create a long-standing friendship between them. It also gave birth to several classes of Brahmins, such as Pirali Brahmins, Sherkhali Brahmins, and Husaini Brahmins.⁴⁶ The Piralis lived in Khulna and Jessore districts and the Tagore family of Jorasanko (Calcutta) belonged to this class of Brahmins.⁴⁷ Due to their contact with the Muslims the Pirali Brahmins were held as outcastes and no upper caste Brahmin was prepared to marry a Pirali girl.

The Husaini Brahmins are a class of priests of the Muslims and Hindus both.⁴⁸ They are a curious product of the society. Among the low class Hindus, they acted as the worshippers of Hindu deities using sacred thread, and for the lower section of Muslims, they used to pray in the Masjid⁴⁹ (where the prayer of Muslims takes place). They

42. Ibid ;

O 'Malley, L.S.S. "Practices Common to Hindus and Musalmans", *Census of India 1911*, Vol.5, p.252.

43. Ibid.

44. Suchase, F.A. op.cit. (Mymensingh), pp.36-38.

45. Ibid.

* They were labourer by profession and belonged to North Bengal.

46. Basu, N.N. *Vanger Jātiya Itihās*, Part I, (Brahman Kanda) p 260 ; Nitra, S.K. op.cit., Vol.I, p.304.

47. Chakravorty, A.K. *Maharshi Debendranath*, p.44.

48. Sen, K.N. *Bhārate Hindu Musalmāner Jukta Sāadhanā*, p. 17.

49. Ghosal, J. *Kāṣi Parikramā*, p. 165.

were known as Husaini Brahmins in the Punjab. It can be well inferred that new converts finding no other means of spiritual sustenance engaged themselves in this double role. It is interesting to note how in the process of historical development of the society in Bengal, the Pirali Brahmins and Husaini Brahmins tried to combine in themselves the elements of both Hindu and Muslim religions. But this effort to a synthesis of religions was short-lived and left hardly any permanent effect. By the end of the nineteenth century the Husaini Brahmins were absorbed among the Muslims and the Pirali Brahmins among the Hindus and the Brahmos.

Christianity in Bengal

Bengal witnessed a remarkable outburst of Christian activity in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Christian missionaries started coming to Bengal from an early time, but that was an intermittent flow. The Portuguese came to Bengal during the reign of Shah Jehan.¹ With the Portuguese came the Jesuit fathers. Some of them were good physicians and because of their superior medical knowledge and dexterity they were greatly honoured at the Emperor's court. In the beginning, the Jesuit fathers carried on their proselytising work clandestinely. They were pirates in disguise. They pretended to be Brahmins and dressed like *Sanyāsīs* (Hermits) and forged the Vedas.² They quietly carried on the work of conversion in the villages. In 1663, the young Prince of Bhusana (in Dacca) was kidnapped by the pirates and later on converted to Christianity by Father D. D.

1. Campos, J. J. A. *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*. p.46; "Vange Portugues Prabhab", *Sāhitya Parishad Patrika*, 1318 B. S., No. 1 pp. 47-48

2. "Results of Missionary Labour in India", *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 16, 1851, p. 236

Rosario³. The Prince later came to be known by the name of Dom Antonio who succeeded in converting many Hindus. This activity of the missionaries gradually spread to other parts of Bengal.

The first Protestant Missionary who became active in Bengal was Kiernander (1711-1799). Before coming to Bengal, he had been in charge of the Cuddalore mission in South Arcot. There in 1742 he had opened a Tamil School where forty students who were all sons of merchants and tradesmen received education.⁴ In 1758 after the French occupation of Arcot, he was invited by Clive to Bengal.⁵ After many years of labour, he succeeded in converting one Ghanshyamdas* of Uttar Pradesh, who was the interpreter and translator of the Supreme Court.⁶

Besides Kiernander, there was one John Thomas, who had come to India as the Surgeon of the "Oxford" East India men. He also took interest in the proselytisation work. Although engaged in the Indigo factory at Malda, he with the help of Ram Ram Vasu, a Bengali Pundit, learnt the Bengali language and translated some portions of the New Testament.⁷

These were, however, individual attempts and no organised effort was made for the propagation of the Christian faith. Christianity, therefore, did not make much headway among the general mass of the people. But after the seventies of the eighteenth century, the climate in India became favourable for the spread of Christianity. The Great

3. Gupta, A. C. (Ed) *Studies in Bengal Renaissance*, pp. 448-449

4. "The first Protestant Missionary to Bengal", *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 7, 1847, pp 146-147.

5. Kaye, J. W. *Christianity in Bengal*, p. 87

6. Ritcher, J. R. *A History of Missions in India*, p. 130

7. "Sāhitya Sādhak Charitmālā", Vol. 1 No. 6. p. 7

* In some other books, he has been named as Ganesh Datta.

Famine of 1770,⁸ aggravated by the rapacity of the 'black supervisors'* coupled with the moral degradation of the local population offered an admirable opportunity to the Christian missionaries, for rendering service to the people and winning them to their faith. The attitude of the East India Company, however, was hostile to Christianity in the initial stage. It was the declared policy of the Company not to interfere with the personal religion of the Indians. The company was apprehensive that any encouragement to Christianity would endanger their empire in India, which was then not very secure. That is why in spite of the pressure of the Evangelical or Clapham sect, who wanted to 'reclaim lost souls' in India, no clause for the moral or social improvement of the Indians was incorporated in the Charter Act of 1793.⁹

But the description of the debased condition of the Indian Society greatly moved Carey, a member of the Baptist Mission. He very much appreciated the efforts of Thomas and sent a letter to him and his friends who had established a Baptist Society urging their co-operation in propagating the gospel among the Indians.¹⁰ In this letter, he expressed his desire to go to Bengal and preach the gospel there if he was assured of the Society's support. The Society assured him of all help. He began to collect funds in the streets of London for visiting India¹¹, and eventually joined Thomas

8. Hunter, W. W. *Annals of Rural Bengal*, pp. 19-21

9. Banerjee, A. C. *Indian Constitutional Documents*. Vol. I, pp. 108-118

* Indian *naibs* and *gomastas* were appointed by their European master to supervise every thing regarding land. These *naibs* and *gomasta* extracted revenue from the peasants more ruthlessly than their European master.

10. Carey, S. P. *William Carey*, p. 109

11. Kaye, J. W. op. cit, p 224.

in Bengal in November, 1793.¹² In Calcutta, Carey had to face great difficulties for some years. He however, braved all odds and continued his missionary work with zeal. Carey was a great linguist. He already had a good knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, French and Latin and now he started learning Bengali and Sanskrit, with the help of Ram Ram Vasu. In a short time, he picked up Bengali so well that he began translating the Bible into the Bengali language and by 1796, his work was completed. Fountain, another co-religionist, who also knew Bengali helped him in this work of translation.¹³ Although the translation work had been completed, it could not be published for lack of funds. Carey, therefore, tried to raise funds for its publication. He succeeded in collecting some money and bought a printing press, which was being sold on auction¹⁴. This solved his problem of publication. By 1799 the Bengali Translation of the Bible was out and it was distributed to the Bengalees free of cost. The acquisition of a printing press greatly facilitated his proselytisation work.

The London Missionary Society moved by the reports* received from Bengal sent Rev. Forsyth to take up the work of conversion there.¹⁵ Rev. Forsyth established a mission at Chinsurah but could effect little because of paucity of funds. This was however, the first organised

12. Smith, G. *Life of William Carey*, pp 40-42.

11. *Sāhitya Sādhak Charitmālā*, Vol. I No. 15, p-15

14. Carey, S. P. op. cit. p 177

* Grant's observation entitled 'View of the State of Society among the Hindu subjects of Great Britain particularly with respect to morals depicted Indian Society vividly. (See Parliamentary Papers, 1812-13, H/C Vol 10, pp 25-35).

15. *Calcutta Christian Observer*, December, 1833, p. 590

attempt to spread the gospel. Carey also realised the value of organisation and with some of his friends formed the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792.¹⁶ The management of the society was vested in a Committee of five consisting of Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, John Sutcliff, Reynold Hogg and William Carey.¹⁷ Carey's endeavours for the spread of Christianity in Bengal did not evoke much enthusiasm in England. Even the Church of England did not show any interest in his work.¹⁸ The attitude of the East India Company was not only unhelpful but hostile too. Therefore Carey had to leave Calcutta and settle in Serampore a Danish principality, where two missionaries from the Baptist Missionary society of England, Marshman and Ward had already arrived on the 13th October, 1799.¹⁹

With the coming of Carey the famous Serampore Mission came into being. Carey and his group went to the different parts of Bengal highlighting the weaknesses of the Hindu society and promising to remove them by preaching the gospel and mass conversion to Christianity. In the work of conversion they adopted a novel method. Carey had noticed the Vaisnavas of Bengal preaching *Harinām* (name of Krishna) by means of *Nagar Sankirtan* (religious songs sung in procession along the streets of a town) with the accompaniment of cymbals.* To attract the Indian masses he began to preach the gospel in the same way.²⁰ The two

16. Smith, G. *Life of William Carey*, pp. 37-38

17. Ibid

18. Vasu, P.N. *History of Hindu Civilisation*, p. 9

19. Wenger, J. S. (Ed. by) *Missionary Biographies* Vol I, Part 1, p. 7

20. *The Indian Report of the Baptist Mission for 1881*, p. 69

* Later on, Scottish Missionary Society also believed that preaching would be easy through this method. (See Bengal Magazine, November, 1880).

compositions, 'Kristobibaranamritam' and 'Nistāraratnākar' were prepared on the model of *Pamchalī* (Bengali doggeral poem) and it worked remarkably well.²¹ Carey's group preached their gospel not only through dance and music but they also addressed people in the market and on the roads.²² Catechists and native itinerant preachers were also appointed for convincing the people. Tarachand was one of them.²³

In order to enlist the sympathy of the converts the Baptist Mission tolerated many Hindu practices and never asked them to discard the Upabit (sacred thread) or to renounce the caste. Ward once paid money to a convert to buy Sacred thread.^{23(a)}

Carey recruited his converts irrespective of caste, creed or sex. The first person to be influenced by the gospel was Ram Ram Vasu.²⁴ In 1787 he came in contact with John Thomas and was greatly impressed by Christianity. He composed a song in Bengali in praise of Christ in 1788 and in 1802 he translated two hymns into the Bengali language.²⁵ He also helped Carey in translating the Bible into the Bengali language. "Ram Ram Vasu's daily conversation betokened also a deep conviction of the truth of the gospel and there was reason to hope that he might soon be an acknowledged follower of Christ."²⁶ This hope, however was not fulfilled because Vasu never formally embraced Christianity.

21. Chakravorty, H. *Dāsarathi O Tānhar Pāmchālī*, p. 9
22. *Periodical Accounts* Vol 5, p. 107
23. Ibid. Vol. 5. p. 537, *The Indian Report of the Baptist Mission for 1880*, pp. 10-11
(a) Carey S. P. *William Carey* p. 243
24. Lewis, C. B. *The Life of John Thomas* pp. 111-112
25. *Sāhitya Sādhak Charitmālā* Vol. 1, No. 6, pp. 16 and 27.
26. Lewis, C. B. op. cit, p. 112

The first person who formally embraced Christianity at the hands of the Baptist Missionaries was Krishna Pal, a carpenter by profession,²⁷ who belonged to the Kartābhajā* sect. The first educated convert was Pitamber, who later on became a school teacher.²⁸ Carey employed the educated converts in the proselytisation work of the mission and sent them to remote villages to preach the gospel. He mostly tried to draw his converts from the lower middle class because he felt that it were the middle class which formed the main bulk of the population and if he succeeded in enlisting their support the work of the mission would be greatly furthered. Jaymani was the first Bengali woman to be baptised.²⁹

She succeeded in persuading another lady, Unna, to embrace Christianity³⁰. Ananda, the wife of a shoemaker was also converted³¹. Sebakram, who became a convert in 1805, used to preach regularly in the chapel of Alipore³². Kangalee a *bairagee* (mendicant) was converted in 1805.³³ In Ward's Journal, we find reference to the conversion of Padmanabhi, a Brahmin of Bhutan, who embraced Christianity to get rid of physical afflictions.³⁴ Krishna Prasad was another Brahmin convert and his conversion was greatly publicised to show that the Christians claimed Brahmins as converts.³⁵ Even the untouchables were not spared. Some

27. Smith, G. *Life of William Carey*, p.96
- * A detailed study of this sect has been made in chapter 4, sec (b)
28. Ibid, p. 101
29. Ibid, p. 96
30. Ibid, p.101
31. Ibid
32. *Periodical Accounts*, Vol 4.p.162
33. Ibid (Preface) p.x
34. Ibid
35. Smith, G. op cit, p.102

members of the *pariah* and *dher* (low class) class also embraced Christianity³⁶. Even the Muslims were not neglected. The first Muslim convert was Peroo³⁷. Another muslim convert was Saduk Shah who became an ardent Christian and helped in preaching the gospel in the rural areas³⁸. The Missionaries moved about in the villages and tried to convince the villagers that their sufferings could be removed if they embraced Christianity. The teachings of the missionaries did not go completely in vain. It did create some impression on the villagers. A section of the people of Bansberia and adjoining villages were very much interested in hearing and discussing the gospel. It is true that they did not embrace Christianity but they showed keen interest in it. They invited missionaries to know about the gospel and took active part in the religious discussions. The names of Krishna, Sebakram and Ananda Chandra Gupta stood prominent among them³⁹. Thus it is clear, that Calcutta and its suburbs were greatly influenced by the movement. The teachings of the missionaries were so popular among the school-boys of the time that Tarachand wrote to Ward on the 20th June, 1815, "I thank God that some of the school boys are so well acquainted with the Christian religion that they over turn every word of the idolators who visit the School⁴⁰. The task of conversion was not an easy one, especially at that time. The converts were not only socially boycotted but were maltreated. Sometimes they even lost their right in the family property. Not only, the converts were

36. Risley, H.H. *The People of India*, p.249

37. Carey. S.P. op cit, p.263

38. Ibid.

39, *Periodical Accounts*, Vol.4, pp 307 ann 311

40. Ibid

41. Carey, S.P. William Carey, p. 198

belaboured but the preachers were also chased and beaten. Carey himself once admitted that he was chased like hounds by the people⁴¹. But inspite of these difficulties the Serampore Mission succeeded in converting a number of persons.⁴² They had as their converts people of different races representing different sections of society. Their converts were not only from the Armenians, Portuguese and the Chinese⁴³, but they also came from the ranks of shoemaker, weaver, and washerman. Conversion among high caste Hindus was not very popular and conversion among the Brahmins was rare.

In 1816, the 'Church Missionary Society also became active in the proselytisation work. It is said that the Church Missionary Society was founded in India in 1799 but was only in 1817 that they became active in Bengal. Under the leadership of Deer, they chose Calcutta as their centre of activity.⁴⁴ This group used to render service to the people in times of epidemic or natural calamity. It failed to win converts in Calcutta and therefore shifted its centre of activity to Nadia. In Krishna-nagar and Nadia the Church Missionary Society was also able to win converts from all classes of people.* Besides, a small number of Muslims of lower and middle class, there were some Brahmin converts whose services were utilised for teaching the Bible.⁴⁵ In 1830 another missionary of this group, Tweedle, succeeded in converting a large number of young men of Salkia, (Howrah district) some of

42. *Missionary Register*, June, 1816.

43. *Periodical Accounts*, Vol.4, p.177

44. Long J. *Handboak of Bengal Missions*. pp 109-110

45. Ibid. p. 185

* For details on this point see the article "Religious Movement in Krishnananger" published in *Friend of India*, April 11, 1839.

whom were of upper caste.⁴⁶ This society sent Greenwood and Schroetar to Mirzapur to establish a mission.⁴⁷ Thus in the twenties of the nineteenth century, three groups of missionaries, viz, the London Missionary Society, the Baptist Missionary Society and the Church Missionary Society were active in Bengal. Of all these groups the Baptist Missionary Society was the most prominent and it had succeeded in creating a deep impression on the minds of the Bengalis. The establishment of schools, orphan houses and distribution of the Bible free of cost by the Baptist Missionaries created a stir in the social life of Bengal, mainly in Calcutta and its suburbs and in the districts of Jessore, Dacca and Dinajpore.⁴⁸ The success of the Baptist Mission began to be resented by the Hindus and met with opposition from them. The opposition gathered momentum, when Golook, a young girl, who had been earlier betrothed to a person refused to marry him after her conversion to Christianity.⁴⁹ This raised great indignation in the society and an appeal was made by the Magistrate against the activities of the Christian missionaries. The opposition became more vehement when Carey bought a few girls from the prostitutes and married them to Christians.⁵⁰ Carey's life was threatened and some men even appealed to the Legislative Council to pass a legislation to check the activities of the Christian missionaries. All these incidents retarded the progress of Carey's work. So after 1817, Carey gave up actively participating in conversion

46. Ibid, p. 46

47. Badley, B. H. *Indian Missionary Directory and Memorial* Vol. p. 76

48. *Periodical Accounts*, No. 1, p. 3, 4, 9. and 24.

49. Carey, S. P. op cit, p. 243

50. *Upadesak*, September, 1849. p. 213

work or missionary propaganda and engaged himself in starting magazines for propagating his views.*

In 1813, the second Charter Act was passed. It contained a provision to the establishment of a Bishopric in India. Accordingly, a Bishopric was established in Calcutta and in 1814 Thomas Fanshaw Middleton was appointed the first Bishop.⁵¹ He was a great Greek Scholar and distributed books on morality and christianity through the Christian Knowledge Society.* He encouraged the establishment of schools and supported the study of English, which he hoped would lead the people of India to think. But he was "more averse to Protestant Sectarianism than Hinduism."⁵² Perhaps for this reason, he took little interest in conversion work and engaged himself in intellectual pursuits. Bishop Middleton established a college to train Indian Christians as preachers or teachers.⁵³ Reginald Heber was appointed the second Bishop of Calcutta in 1823. At Oxford, he had been the most distinguished student of his time. He was well-known for his amiable behaviour. He had studied Hindustani and Persian and his "Voyages through the Upper Provinces of India" gave an accurate picture of Indian life. The Calcutta Bishopric

* In 1818, Carey edited *Friend of India* and *Digdarshan* and *Samāchār Darpan* was published by Marshman.

51. "Bishop Middleton," *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 13, 1850 p. 22; Kaye, J. K. op. cit., p. 313

* An institution for furnishing knowledge about Christianity. A branch of the institution was established in Calcutta which became most active during the second decade of the nineteenth century.

52. Ibid. p. 38

53. Banerjee, B. N. *Samvād Patre Sekāler Kathā*, Vol I, p. 24

concerned itself more with philanthropic activities and in highlighting social vices and therefore much attention was not given to proselytisation work. The Bishops who succeeded Heber were all men of mediocre ability and therefore the Bishopric did not wield the same influence in the social life of the city as it had done before.

The Baptist Missionary Society which had become dormant after Carey's withdrawal from proselytisation work in 1817 received fresh strength with the arrival of Ward and Marshman in Bengal. The publication of several newspapers and magazines facilitated their work of proselytisation. From now on the Baptist Missionaries started attacking virulently the philosophical basis of Hinduism. The Serampore Missionaries questioned the truths of many of the tenets of Hindu theology in the *Samāchār Darpan*. They pointed out the contradictions in the Hindu theology and stated that :

(1) The Hindus admit the doctrine of *māyā* and unreality of the world. But this doctrine actually brings reproach under the nature of God as Supreme Being. *Māyā*, as the cause of the world and as concealing the true nature of God becomes superior to God. And again *Māyā* as an inseparable power of God has to be taken as eternal. Hence the eternity of both *Māyā* and God is established which is contradictory to the belief of the Hindus.⁵⁴

(2) If the soul and God be the one and the same, we cannot justify the belief that the soul is rewarded or punished for the works (*Karma*) it performs.⁵⁵

(3) The Hindus profess the oneness of God but in practice they take gods to be many. Not only that the

54. *Samāchār Darpan*, July 14, 1821

55. *Ibid*

gods are many but also that they are object of the senses, as pointed out by the *Purāṇas* and the *Tantras*.⁵⁶

(4) Inconsistent and contradictory opinions about the ethical duties are held by different Hindu philosophical works.⁵⁷

This was the first time that the orthodox Hinduism met with so great an attack from the foreign religionist. It began from the time of Marshman and continued till the departure of Duff in 1850. The Hindu Society became very much alarmed and began seeking means to counteract it. When the Baptist Missionary Society was carrying on its programme, the Gospel Society with its branch, the Diocesan Committee, came into being in 1825.⁵⁸ They inspected the workings of several schools made over to them by the Christian Knowledge Society in 1828.⁵⁹ Rev. Morton, who was the first Missionary sent by the society to Bengal reached Chinsurah in 1821.⁶⁰

We find mention of yet another small missionary group. This was the Wesleyan Mission; which had built a chapel and had opened some schools. But its centres were scattered and due to lack of funds and organised leadership it could not gain any prominence and consequently had to shift its centre outside Bengal.⁶¹

56. *Ibid*

* The objection rests on incomplete understanding of the Hindu theology. The *Purāṇas* and the *Tantras* actually inculcate the doctrine of one God. The various gods represented in them are actually manifold expressions of the one.

57. *Ibid*.

58. Long, J. *op.cit.*, pp. 250-151.

59. *Ibid*.

60. Badley, B.H. *op.cit.*, p. 98.

61. *Ibid*.

The London Missionary Society which had been established in 1798 but had sunk into obscurity because of the influence of the Baptist Missionary Society rose into prominence once again. This was because of the leadership of Mullens, who was the secretary of the Society. He attacked the basis of Hinduism in a valuable essay, "Vedantism and Christianity". In it he attacked Vedantism on the following grounds :—

(i) The Vedanta fails to provide its followers with a well defined ethical code. We cannot ascertain from it the duties of man to God or to his society. If the world is illusory, moral distinctions can have no meaning. The Christian religion is superior to the Vedanta, because there is explicit mention of the duties of man to God, to himself and to his fellowmen in the Bible.⁶²

(2) The Vedanta believes in the identity of the soul with Brahma. The soul is as perfect as God. It cannot err. There is then no scope of ethics in such a system. Christianity, however, takes man to be a fallen Adam and ethical discipline is necessary for its redemption.⁶³

(3) The Vedanta Philosophy can be described as a philosophy of abstract idealism. It is idealism not only because it talks about an ideal but also because it conceives the ultimate reality as spiritual. It is abstract because it is not possible to determine the character of the ultimate reality or such an abstract conception of God can hardly inspire confidence in man to undertake any moral endeavour. But Christianity conceives God as a person, such a God can guide man to perfect happiness.⁶⁴

(4) The Advaita Vedanta conceives God as Nirguna.

62. "Vedantism and Christianity". *Calcutta Review*, Vol 17, 1852, pp 271—280

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

formless and indeterminate. Absolute God is an impersonal being. No where has he been mentioned as a Being full of love and kindness. Such a formless God is of no use to a religious aspirer. But in Christianity God is conceived as a Being endowed with high moral qualities. The Christian conception of God, it was concluded, was more suitable for the Hindus to worship than the Impersonal Absolute of the Vedanta⁶⁵.

These criticisms of the Hindu Philosophy enraged a great section of people who demanded that Christian missionaries should be strongly checked.⁶⁶ Lady Mullens wrote at that time, "Phulmani O Karuṇār Vivaraṇa"* which described the faults and virtues of Indian Christians. It was said to be the earliest Bengali novel written by an European lady. The London Missionary Society was not remarkable as a propagandist agency, nor did it take up the work of conversion very earnestly. It was chiefly interested in philanthropic activities.

In the early thirties of the nineteenth century, all the three missionary groups, the Church Missionary Society, the Baptist Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society were active in Bengal. About the same time, the Scottish Mission also sent its representative, Alexander Duff to Bengal. Duff reached Calcutta on the 27th May, 1830⁶⁷. He was a gifted man of resolute character and the best orator of the General Assembly.* As early as 1818, English in his sermon to the General Assembly

65. I bid

66. *Friend of India*, May 29, 1845 pp.343-344

* This book has been recently edited by Chittaranjan Banerjee and the original copy has been preserved by the Serampore Carey library.

67. Smith, G. *Life of Alexander Duff* p.25

* An educational institution of Scotland.

of the Scottish Mission had asked Duff to establish a branch of the Church of Scotland in India to work in the rural areas of Bengal.⁶⁸ Duff, however chose Calcutta as his field of activity because it offered him an extensive field to preach his religious and educational ideas.

Duff made a good beginning by converting many persons from the low caste,⁶⁹ but this did not satisfy him. He felt that Hinduism would remain unaffected if the leaders of the Society were not converted. Therefore, Duff moved and conversed among the upper classes. With the help of Raja Rammohun Roy, he managed to get a hall in Chitpore Road, where students used to read the Bible.⁷⁰ The first batch of students came to read the Bible under the Raja's inspiration. When Duff was trying to execute his plan of proselytisation in Calcutta the Church Missionary Society under Deer was active among the Kartabhaja Sect* of Nadia. Between 1832 and 1838, Deer and his group succeeded in converting a good number of villagers in the Nadia district.⁷¹ After that we get very little mention of its conversion work and the group concentrated itself only in educational activities. The other groups also receded into the background and the missionary group headed by Duff remained alone in the field. Duff was a man of strong will power ; his plan of conversion and criticism of the Hindu *shastras* (religious texts) went on side by side. Mahesh Chandra Ghose, the famous disciple of Derozio was regarded as

68. Paton. W. *Alexander Duff, Pioneer of Missionary Activities* p. 66

Ibid pp. 112-114.

69. Ibid., p. 56.

70. Ibid., p. 57 ; Ganguly, M. *Bānglār Navajāgarāner Sākshar*, p. 57

71. Loc. cit., *Friend of India*, April 11, 1839.

the first convert of Duff from the upper caste.⁷² Krishna Mohan Banerjee another disciple of Derozio was Duff's second convert.⁷³ This event attracted a very wide notice. Referring to that event Duff wrote, "His (Krishna Mohan) baptism, in particular became the theme of conversation and discussion which every group that met on the street or in the *bazar*, in every snug coeterie reposing under shade from the mid-day sun, in every school and in every family circle."⁷⁴ In December 1832 Duff succeeded in converting one Gopinath Nandi,⁷⁵ And in April 1833 one Ananda Chandra Majumdar.⁷⁶ Rev. Lalbehari Dey became a convert on February 25, 1843.⁷⁷ He was appointed the Catechist of the Scottish Church in 1846 and started preaching in Burdwan.⁷⁸ His merit and scholarship impressed Duff greatly. Lalbehari also had great admiration and reverence for the teacher⁷⁶ Though a convert and direct disciple of Duff, Lalbehari strongly criticised the non-appointment of Indians to top rank in the Mission Council.

Michael Madhusudan, the famous poet of Bengal, felt encouraged to embrace Christianity and was baptised in the old Mission Church by Archdeacon Dealtry on 9 Feb-

72. *Calcutta Christian Observer*, Oct., 1832, p. 256.

73. Ghose, R. C. A Biographical sketch of Krishna Mohan Banerje, p. 29

74. Duff, A. *India & India Mission*, pp. 679-80

75. *Calcutta Christian Observer*, January 1833, p. 38

* A separate chapter has been prepared on this sect.

76. Ibid. May 1833, p. 250

77. Bhattacharjee, D. P. "Sruta Kirti Lalbehari Dey", *Sāhitya Parishad Patrikā*. 1367 B. S. No. 1

78. Ibid.

79. "My Recollection of School Days", *Bengal Magazine*, June, 1873 pp. 499 500

ruary 1843.⁸⁰ Kshetra Mohan Chatterjee,⁸¹ a great Bengali Scholar was the next convert. A few year later, Jnanendra Mohan Tagore, son of Prasanna Kumar Tagore (Zamindar of Pathuriaghata) also embraced Christianity and he married Kamalmani, daughter of Krishna mohan.⁸² The conversion of Umesh Chandra Sarkar, a lad of fifteen and his eleven year old wife created a great commotion in the Bengali Society.⁸³ The whole Hindu Society rose against Duff and his associates. "Duff's house was literally besieged".⁸⁴ A letter was published in the Englishman protesting against the conversion of Umesh Chandra, who was then a minor.⁸⁵ It also mentioned that an appeal was made by the Hindus to the Supreme Court against this conversion, but the court did not interfere. This letter shows how much the people had started resenting the proselytisation work of the Christian missionaries. Duff's activities did not remain confined to Calcutta alone, it went outside also. An inhabitant of Bally named Jagat Chandra Ganguly was attracted towards him.⁸⁶ He was a lad of a devout Hindu family and earned his livelihood by priestly activities. At first, he rose against the beef-eater after wards he made a comparative study of the two philosophies, viz., Hinduism and Christianity, and soon came to realise the superiority of the Christian faith.

80. Som, N. N. *Madu Smrti*, pp 32-34

81. Smith, G. op cit, p. 120

82. Sastri, S. *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Samaj*, p. 158

83. Ghose, B. *Samayik Patre Banglar Samaj Chitra*, Vol II, pp 91-93

84. Smith, G. *Life of Alexander Duff*, pp 254-255 ; Paton, W, op cit pp 80-81

85. *The Englishman*, August 11, 1846, p. 2 (Col. II)

86. Ganguly, J. C. *A sketch of my life and experience*, p. 197.

Ultimately, he was baptised by Dall, an associate of Duff.⁸⁷ His religious experiences are clearly stated in his personal diary, 'A sketch of my life and experience'.

After 1845, Duff realised that to implant his ideas in Hindu minds mere conversion would not be sufficient, the philosophical basis of Hinduism should also be strongly criticised. With this aim, Duff published some articles in the *Friend of India*⁸⁸ and some in the *Calcutta review* during 1844-45. There began a serious controversy between Debendranath Tagore and Duff. A study of the different periods through which Hinduism had passed convinced Duff that the Hindus had transition state of mind with which they resisted the proselytisation efforts of the missionaries. The Hindu mind was so flexible that it responded favourably to different religions in different ages. The Hindu mind was bound by 'artificial ligaments'.⁸⁹ and it would not be impossible for it to accept Christianity.

To prove the supremacy of the Christian faith he stated the following things against Hinduism :

(1) God in the Vedanta is destitute of love. The word "compassion" is completely absent in it. It does not teach us to love our neighbours or enemy. There is no word of religious consolation.⁹⁰

(2) Vedanta lacks a moral standard, by which actions are judged. "There is no royal law like the Ten Commandments of the Bible"⁹¹

Debendranath replied to both the criticism in the

87. *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.

88. *Friend of India*, May, 1845 (Monthly series)

89. "The Transition States of Hindu Mind" *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 3, 1845 p. 109

90. *Ibid.*, pp 109-111.

91. "Vedantism-What is it ?" *Calcutta review*, Vol. 4, 1845, p 56

columns of the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, His arguments were as follows :

(1) It is true that the Hindu Philosophy recognises God or Brahma as *Nirguna*. The qualities of wisdom, anger faculty of vision being finite and transitory can not be attributed to God. The Vedanta declares the very identity of God to be the substitute of the perfection of all attributes.⁹²

(2) It is also not true that the Vedanta has no moral code. The vedanta establishes moral rules of human conduct by "a Command over our passions, and over the body and good acts".⁹³

Thus religious differences between Duff and Debendranath continued. Debendranath was not only content with counteracting Duff through *Tattwabodhini Patrikā*; he and his group* adopted another method of resisting the progress of Christianity. The Hindus believed that the missionaries had attempted to convert those whom they thought to be able to read and write. To check conversion by this means and to resist the Hindus from going to missionary schools they resolved to start a college, which did not charge any tuition fee⁹⁴. Accordingly, the Seal's free College was established on the 2nd May, 1842.⁹⁵ Thus they tried to arrest the rising tide of Christianity. It is interesting to note that both the liberal and conservative sections joined hands in warding off this danger. Iswar Chandra Gupta, through his *Sambād*

92. Ghose, B. *Sāmāyik patre etc.* Vol. II, pp. 434-496

93. Ibid. p. 496

* The group consisted of the conservative section of Calcutta headed by Debendranāth. With them joined the Seal and Mullick family of Calcutta.

94. Ghose, H. P. *Dānbir Motilal Seal*, pp 64-68.

95. Ghose, B. *Samayik Patre etc.* Vol II, p. 535

Prabhākar also opposed the missionaries. He accused the missionaries of patronising the converts by giving them monetary help and inducing them to slander Hinduism.⁹⁶ Thus as Christianity began to gain more converts, the greater opposition it had to face from the Hindus. When the news that Duff was planning to deliver a series of lectures to the students of his college on 'God and His Revealing*', the citizens of Calcutta strongly protested against it.⁹⁷ Duff's College was deserted. The orthodox Hindus cried out that the padre (Duff) was bent upon breaking down the bulwarks of Hinduism and put Christianity in its place. Thus Duff had to face stiff opposition.

Again when in 1848 Duff converted Kailash Chandra Bose, a teacher of the Hindu College, Debendranath firmly demanded Bose's resignation from the College.⁹⁸ There was thus a great resentment in the Hindu Society against the activities of the Christian missionaries which was voiced by them in a protest meeting in which every section of the Hindu society participated.⁹⁹ Most of the Hindu journals began to criticise the Christian missionaries. The *Samvādpūrna-Chandrodaya*, which was an organ of the conservative Hindus remarked thus: "The Christian missionaries by trying to show the absurdities of Hinduism forced the boys in their school to renounce their ancestral religion."¹⁰⁰ Soon afterwards a meeting was held in Burdwan in protest against mass conversion. In that meeting it was decided to

96. Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 151-152

97. Mukherjee, H. and Mukherjee, U. *The growth of Nationalism in India*, pp. 6-7

* These lectures were never delivered.

98. Bengal, J. C. "Sikshā Bistāte Debendranāth", *Sāhitya Parishad Patrikā*, 1350 B. S. No. 3

99. *Friend of India* May 22, 1846, p. 322

100. *Samvādpurnachandrodaya*, Ashār 8, 1258, B. S. p.3.

take steps to stop conversion and to reduce the number of converts.¹⁰¹ Thus it appears that from the fifties of the nineteenth century a well planned and wide spread agitation began against the missionaries. The Scottish Mission which had started with great promise in the thirties of the nineteenth century came at a low ebb in 1845. Duff stayed in Bengal for a few years more* but he engaged himself in propagating his social and educational ideas and in studying Bengali.

The Socio-religious life of the Christians of Bengal provided a typical example of acculturation. This was perceptibly manifest in Nadia, where Indian Christians lived in large number.* They had been, for generations, living side by side with the Hindus. Moreover, they were drawn from the Hindu Society. These two factors were chiefly responsible for this phenomenon of acculturation. The converted Indians had retained some of the Hindu customs and accepted some from Christianity. The Christian society of Bengal especially those in Nadia were seen to observe many Hindu rites, such as *namkaran*, *annaprāsan*, *saptapadīgaman*† and the use of vermilion by married ladies. They often visited Hindu temples besides their routine church prayer. This was coexistence and not a fusion of the two giving birth to any new set of values.

Social and Educational ideas of the missionaries

The Christian missionaries of Bengal not only converted

101. Ibid.

* He stayed in Bengal upto 1850,

* According to the Census of 1901, there were 7,912 Indian Christians in Nadia District.

† *Nāmakaran*—Ceremony of giving name to a child after its birth. *Annaprāsan*—Ceremony of putting rice to a child's mouth for the first time.

Saptapadīgaman—The custom of taking seven steps by husband and wife during marriage.

people to Christianity but also highlighted the social evils and superstitions of the Hindu Society and even tried to remove them. When they came, they found that people instead of worshipping one True God were paying homage to several gods and goddesses. Idolatry was prevalent. The true meaning of religion was lost leaving behind certain practices and prejudices associated with the name of religion. Female infanticide, sacrifice of child into the Gangā-Sāgar, the deep rooted caste-system, the predominance of the priestly class and the low position of the women in society were instances of the degeneration of the Hindu Society. The Hindus were divided into so many castes and sub-castes and the low caste people were looked down upon by the upper castes. Women held a very low position in the society. They were burnt alive along with the dead body of their husbands. They were deprived of the right to own property. The missionaries also noticed that Sanskrit was the medium of instruction which could be understood by very few persons. They therefore voiced their opposition against idolatry, polytheism, caste rigidity and the low position of women.

Idolatry—The missionaries were against idolatry. They thought that images were made of clay and it was sheer foolishness to worship them. They also criticised rituals which were part of the Hindu religion. They felt that the rituals in a Hindu worship were 'meaningless drudgery'. They could not understand why people in such large numbers flocked to the temple of Puri and Hardwar.¹⁰² They laughed at the *Charakpuja*.¹⁰³ They thought that the worship of images entailed heavy expenditure which should be instantly stopped. These missionaries alleged

102. *Samāchār Darpan*. May 1819 ;

Missionary Register, June, 1816, p. 76

103. Ibid. p 25, Smith G, *Life of Bishop Heber*, p. 179 ; Banerjee, B. N. op cit, Vol II p. 378

that the Hindu parents instructed their sons to bow down before gods, trees and stones but never instructed them to respect their superiors.¹⁰⁴ The idea of Duff regarding idolatry was much more extreme than that of the other missionaries. To quote him, "What horrid and monstrous practices does it inculcate. Black and sullen and stupendous piles reared in the recesses of a past eterniry and covering the whole land with their deadly bodies".¹⁰⁵ Duff was critical of the Hindu religion itself and spoke of the religious authorities of the Hindus with abomination. Many of the Journals and Travel accounts of the christian missionaries give out the view of the missionaries on Hindu religion. It seems that very few of them had any reverence for the Hindu religion, which they characterised as 'polluted and foolish'.¹⁰⁶ The Baptist Missionaries viewed, "Seeb as committing adultery and Krishna lying".¹⁰⁷

The missionaries also noticed the rigidity of the caste system. They noticed several examples of caste-rigidity, which appeared to them indecent and unjnst. Ward mentioned an incident in this connection.¹⁰⁸ He noticed that when the roof of a house in Bangalore which was under repair fell down on a labourer, nobody came to his rescue, as he belonged to a low caste. The missionaries also noticed that if a Sudra entered the kitchen of a Brahmin, the latter threw away all the food as defiled.¹⁰⁹ It reflected the unmerciful and unsocial character of the Hindus. The missionaries also found that a Brahmin lost his caste only because he went to England.¹¹⁰ They cited a number of

104. *The Evangelist*, February, 1844.

105. Duff, A. *India and India Misson*, p.212

106. Smith, G. *Life of Bishop Heber* p.197

107. *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. p.309

108. Ward, W.F.De. *India and the Hindus*, p.199

109. I bid.

110. I bid.

examples showing trifling reasons for which men were excommunicated from the society. They strongly opposed these and as a protest, they asked the *Pundits* of the Serampore College to teach the sacred classics even to the *Sudras*¹¹¹, who were prohibited according to the *Shastras* to read them. Regarding the caste system itself, the missionaries held different views. Some considered the Castes as 'artificial fabrics of falsehood imposed on the society', which impeded the progress of the nation. The Baptist missionaries, especially Carey was at first not very much opposed to the caste system¹¹². During the early part of his life, he tolerated caste distinction in many cases, lest it should bring unrest in the society. But after a few years, he took a firm stand on this issue, because he thought that if caste was retained it would naturally bring many other vices associated with it. Rev. B. Schmid, a member of the Church Missionary Society was very critical of the caste system and enjoined upon the missionaries to preach the equality of caste.¹¹³ He worked mainly in South India and in his schools Brahmin students were taught along with the low caste boys.

Though the missionaries had decried the system outright, yet the Indian converts could not forsake their traditional caste prejudices. This attitude was very noticeable among the Christian converts of Nadia.¹¹⁴ There, the Cobblers though converted to Christianity were not granted equality with other Christians, who came from higher caste Hindus. The Cobblers ate beef and therefore both the Hindu and Christian communities looked down upon them and designated them as 'Muchi Christians'.¹¹⁵ The converts

111. Ingham, K. *Reformers in India*, p.25

112. Ibid., p.26

113. Ibid., p.22

114. Chapra Church M.S.S. Records.

115. Ibid

from Islam received the same treatment and were called 'Muslim Christians', as a result the Hindu and Muslim Christians refused to inter-marry.¹¹⁶ This caste question became very acute during the seventies of the nineteenth century.

The sad plight of the women also attracted the attention of the missionaries. They found that women were very badly treated in the society and in their family too. According to the *Dayābhāg* school of Hindu law, which was prevalent in Bengal, women could not own or inherit property. If a person of an undivided family died leaving no male issue, his widow was not entitled to her husband's property. The missionaries tried to draw the attention of the Government to this problem, and pleaded for the removal of this disqualification.¹¹⁷

The missionaries were also critical of polygamy and early marriage. The Kulin Brahmins in Bengal were sought for in marriage because of their high social pedigree and therefore a Kulin Brahmin married several times. Duff and his group strongly criticised this practice and remarked that early marriage and Kulinism were the two main causes which had brought the women to such a degraded position.¹¹⁸ The missionaries therefore, thought of sending a petition to the Government for removing these evils.¹¹⁹

Carey found that the practice of throwing the children in the Ganga-Sagar was very common practice in Bengal. It was believed that if a *mritabotsa* woman (woman giving birth to dead or short lived children only) sacrificed her

116. Ibid

117. *Parliamentary papers*, 1851, H/C, Vol. 41, No. 35

118. *Bengal Magazine*, January, 1876, pp 266-68 ;
Banerjee, B.N. *Samvādpātre* etc. Vol. II. p.176
and p. 179

119. "On the Polygamy of the Kulin Brahmins",
Calcutta Christian Observer, pp 10-12.

next living child to the Ganga-Sagar, she would beget long living children by the grace of the Goddess Ganga, so *mritabatsā* women made promises to offer their next living issues to Ganga-Sagar and very often they fulfilled their promises. The missionaries considered it to be an act of barbarity. In a report to Government Carey urged for the immediate prohibition of the practice. In 1802 an Act was passed according to which drowning of child at Ganga-Sagar was prohibited.¹²⁰ The missionaries also found that parents took little care of their female child.¹²¹ A poverty stricken parent found it easy to sell his girl, thus selling of girls became common in the Society.¹²² The Hindu society was not only superstitious in case of female child, but it was very rigid in case of women also. If a woman had ever committed any fault she was never taken back in society. For example, Umbika an excommunicated woman had to take the life of a prostitute, as the society was not willing to accept her.¹²³ Thus the unsympathetic attitude of the society helped to increase many kinds of immoralities in the country.

The customs of maintaining some courtesans or dancing girls popularly known as *Devdāsīs* was very much prevalent in Bengal.¹²⁴ *Devdāsīs* were employed for temple service but actually were treated as prostitutes by the priests. The plight of the *devdāsīs* attracted the attention of the missionaries. They strongly opposed this practice and pleaded for the abolition of the system.¹²⁵

120. Marshman, J. C. op. cit., Vol. I p. 158 ; Chapman
P. *Hindu Female Education*

121. "Female Society in India", *Friend of India*, 1820
(Qtly. series) pp. 129-33, No. 4, p. 203.

122. Banerjee, B. N. *Samvādpātre* etc. Vol. III, p. 46.

123. *Samāchār Darpan*, December 12, 1836.

124. Dubois, J. A. *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, p. 254, Chapman, op. cit., p. 45.

125. Ibid.

The Baptist missionaries were also very critical of the *Satī* system.¹²⁶ They considered the burning of widows along with the dead body of their husbands as a barbarous act. Carey and his associates were shocked to see *Satī* widely prevalent in Bengal, and they tried to stop it. Their denunciation of *Satī* was supported by the Asiatic Journal.¹²⁷ Carey submitted a memorial to the Government through the Rev. *Buchanan* but it was not favourably considered.¹²⁸

The missionaries also noticed the pitiable condition of the Hindu women who became widow at an early age. The Hindu widows were not permitted to remarry. Most of the women of Bengal were generally uneducated but some of them who managed to get some education ventilated their grievances through newspapers. In the *Samāchār Darpan* of the 14th March, 1835, some unmarried girls of Kulīn Brahmin families suffering from the evils of Kulinism appealed to the editor of that paper to publicise their lot.¹²⁹ They also pointed out that in Bengal the widows of the Brahmins and *Kayastha* families were not permitted to remarry though the Shastras had sanctioned it. Some women of Chinsurah wrote in their support to the Editor of the *Samāchār Darpan* (on the 21st March, 1835) and demanded "why cannot a wife marry again after the death of her husband when a husband can marry after the death of his wife? Cannot a woman have desire for marriage like a man? Oh dear father and brother! Consider these carefully in your mind and you will realise how

126. *Samāchār Darpan*, March 10, 1820.

127. "Review of a pamphlet on burning widows", *Friend of India*, 1819.

128. *Friend of India*, (Nos. 9-19) 1819, p. 455.

129. Banerjee, B. N. op cit., Vol. II, pp. 186-88.

you find us in grief and insulted like slaves."¹³⁰ This protest of the Bengali women encouraged the missionaries to urge the Government to legalise widow marriage.¹³¹ The enthusiasm of the missionaries for widow remarriage led the Samvād Prabhākār to remark that if the missionaries succeeded in legalising widow-remarriage through their efforts it would be a great day for them.

Besides these, the missionaries also paid their attention to the establishment of orphanages with the object of rescuing the orphans and educating them. The Baptist Missionaries established a permanent boarding institution at Nawabganj in Assam, for this purpose.¹³² The female orphan asylum was founded at Burdwan in 1815 under the supervision of Lady Weithrecht, wife of the resident of the Church Missionary Society.¹³³ In 1836, Lady Wilson started another female orphanage in Agarpāra in which the girls were given some practical training in knitting and lacemaking, etc.¹³⁴

The missionaries noticed that leprosy was prevalent in many districts of Bengal. It excited their sympathy and in a meeting the Baptist missionaries resolved to establish a "New asylum of lepers. Accordingly, the Calcutta asylum for lepers was established.¹³⁵ The Wesleyan Church exerted much to serve the lepers. They also opened a charitable dispensary at Chinsurah,¹³⁶ and a hospital in Calcutta meant for the poor.¹³⁷

130. *Samāchār Darpan*, October 21, 1839.

131. Ghose, B. *Sāmāyikpatre*, etc. Vol. I, p. 191

136. *The Evangelist*, Nov., 1843.

133. Chapman, op. cit. p. 147.

134. *Upadesak*, September, 1849, Chapman op. cit., p. 129

135. *Friend of India*, August, 1818

136. Banerjee, B. N. op. cit., Vol I. p. 162.

137. Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 104

The missionaries knew clearly that the Indian Society would not be free from superstitions and decay if the people were not properly educated. Therefore, imparting education to the people formed part of their programme from the very beginning. Carey realised that to enlighten the illiterate masses Bengali should be adopted as the medium of instruction.¹³⁸ He himself learnt Bengali and lectured in that language in Katwa.¹³⁹ This had the desired effect. Men eagerly listened to what he said. The school established by John Ellerton of the Baptist Missionary Society in Goamalty (near Malda district) was supposed to be the first attempt by the missionaries in Bengal for the spread of education.¹⁴⁰ A few months later Carey opened a free school in Madanahati for the local peasants.¹⁴¹ It was however, at Marshman's instance that the programme of mass education was adopted by the missionaries. In 1813, he submitted a plan to the Baptist Missionary Society of England,¹⁴² in which he suggested that the missionary schools should be opened to all. The medium of instruction should be the language spoken by the people in that part of the country. He suggested that instead of purchasing books, charts containing alphabets and numerals should be prepared and fixed on walls for the use of the students. Besides other subjects, the study of the gospel was to form part of the curriculum. This scheme was to be financed by the Baptist Missionary Society of England. In 1816, Marshman published a booklet, "Hints relative to Native Schools".* The programme of

138. *Missionary Register*. June, 1816, p 204

139. *Periodical Accounts* Vol, III, p, 59

140. *Brief Review of the Baptist Missionary Society* 1815, p. 15

141. *Sāhitya Sādhak Charitāmālā*. Nos No. 15, Vol. I, p. 13

142. Bagal, J. C. *Banglar Jānāsikshā*, pp. 11-12

* The Booklet is not available now.

Marshman became so popular that fortyfive schools were established in Hooghly district. Some rich Indians also helped Marshman in his mission and some of them lent their buildings for the establishment of schools.¹⁴³

The Baptist missionaries also felt the need of teaching and revitalising Oriental Studies. For this, the Serampore College was established in 1821 and Carey was made the Principal.¹⁴⁴ Besides opening schools where teaching was done through the medium of Bengali, the missionaries also opened English teaching schools in those areas where a desire was felt for learning English. Some wealthy Bengali gentlemen also lent support for the spread of English education. Jainarain Ghosal, Zamindar of Bhukailash (Kidderpore) donated five thousand rupees for this purpose.¹⁴⁵ By the thirties of the nineteenth century twenty two English Schools were working where six thousand and fifty-four students were receiving instruction.¹⁴⁶ The missionaries also arranged classes for the teaching of the Gospel. In this work, some Indian preachers helped them.¹⁴⁷

Like the Baptist Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society also exerted much for the spread of education in Bengal. Captain James Stewart, who had learnt Bengali very well, composed *Varnamālā*, *Upadesak* etc.¹⁴⁸ Like Carey and Marshman, he also favoured the idea of imparting education through the medium of Bengali, but he was not in favour of teaching Christian theology in schools. He set up ten schools, through his exertions, in

143. *Ibid*.

144. Wenger, J. (Ed) *Missionary Biographies Vol, I*, p. 38

145. Lushington, C. op cit, p. 45 ;
Long J. op cit. p. 68

146. Loc cit. *Calcutta Review*. 1851, Vol. 16, p. 298

147. *Ibid*., p 243

148. Lushington, op cit, p. 54.

Burdwan where one thousand students received instructions. Besides Bengali literature, which was compulsory, Bengali boys were taught history and Geography. These schools of Stewart won so much reputation that Calcutta School Society* sent one Nicholas Wilard, an eminent educationist, to supervise those schools.¹⁴⁹

The London Missionary set up several schools in Calcutta and neighbouring places¹⁵⁰. They drew students of all castes including Brahmin and Muslim boys. These schools taught all subjects, but the school of Bhowanipore paid special attention on the dissemination of Christian knowledge. Some vernacular schools were also established by Bishop Middleton.¹⁵¹

Alexander Duff introduced a new idea in the field of education. He held the view that for preaching Christianity in Bengal the spread of education was necessary. He thought that the spread of English education would increase his number of converts. Perhaps, these ideas persuaded him to use English as the medium of instruction,¹⁵² which was the "best and amplest channel for speedily letting in the full stream of European knowledge on the minds of those who were destined to influence and direct the national intellect and heart of India".¹⁵³ In each of his schools he

149. Bagal, J.C. *Bāṅglār Janasikshā*, p.9

150. Friend of India, October 4, 1838, p. 557

*In 1818, this society was established. It aimed at promoting moral and intellectual development of Indians and to help those schools which were already established in Calcutta, and to set up other schools. No system of education was to be introduced and no book was to be published without its sanction. It was patronised by men like David Hare, Dwarkanath Tagore and Harimohan Tagore.

151. Long, J. op. cit., p.250

152. Ganguly, M.M. *Bāṅglāy Navājāgarāner Sakshar*, p.48

153. Sherring Smith & Bradley Reports, p.64

introduced English from the earliest stage and to make the foreign words familiar to the Bengali boys he got them carved on pieces of wood. To convey the meaning of Ox, he not only described its physical appearance but its utility also¹⁵⁴. He supplied his pupils with ample number of letters of the English alphabet by which they could easily construct words. This method helped them to raise their intellectual standard. With this plan, he opened the General Assembly's School in 1830.¹⁵⁵ Its popularity surpassed even the popularity of the Hinds College.* After 1840, he divided this institution into two departments, the College and the preparatory class. It was in the preparatory class that he succeeded most. Thus the "intellectual" system of teaching borrowed from Edinburgh was introduced there and exhibited in all novelty to the public of Calcutta. Duff started another school in Taki, in 1831, in the house of Zamindar Kalinath Roy Choudhury.¹⁵⁶ This school was financed by Duff and his Scottish Mission. Besides English, Persian, Arabic and Bengali were also taught there because he felt that a good knowledge of the vernacular would facilitate the study of the English language.¹⁵⁷ This Taki Academy earned so much popularity that within three days of its establishment, it drew three hundred forty students.¹⁵⁸

The distinctive character of Duff's educational idea was that he felt that education should be based on religion. He criticised Indian Education as "godless". He, like Ramnohan

154. Ganguly, M. op. cit., pp. 57-59; Smith, G. *Life of Alexander Duff*, Vol. 1 p. 262.

155. "History of Native Education in Bengal" *Calcutta Review* Vol. 17, 1852, p.359

* For details see J.C.Bagal's article. "The Hindu College", *Modern Review*, July, 1955.

156. Banerjee, B.N. op. cit., Vol. II, p.52

157. *Calcutta Christian Observer*. July, 1832, p.96

158. Ibid.

felt that education divorced from religion was useless and unproductive. So in his school, he had made it compulsory for the boys to read the Bible for one hour daily.¹⁵⁹ He had given each boy a copy of the Bible. The classes started with Lord's prayer. Duff took much pains to translate the Bible into Bengali.¹⁶¹ His avowed object of the scheme of education was to break down the bulwarks of Hinduism and to substitute Christianity in its place. With this end in view, he directed Clift* a famous Economist of the time to write a book on Political Economy.¹⁶¹ He thought that the publication of this book would remove the superstition among Hindu students and inculcate some interest among them for the indigenous commerce and agriculture. But due to the hostility of the Committee of Public Instruction the book could not be published. However, Duff's schools were very popular and they drew large number of students.¹⁶² The popularity of these school encouraged some wealthy men of Bengal to establish English Schools near about Calcutta. Some rich Zamindars of Telinipara of the Hooghly district established a school there.¹⁶³ The Zamindar of Burdwan donated one thousand rupees for the establishment of an English School.¹⁶⁴

Female Education.

The Christian missionaries viewed the pitiable condition of the women in India. They noticed that the birth of a

159. "My Recollection of School Days", *Bengal Magazine*, June 1873, p. 499

160. Ibid

161. Ganguly, M.M. op cit, p 67

* He was an Assistant Teacher of the General Assembly.

162. Banerjee, B.N. op cit, Vol II, p.50

163. Ibid, p.58

164. Ibid, p.59

daughter was not a very welcome event in the Hindu Society.¹⁶⁵ The Hindu women were not allowed to be educated because of the superstition in the society that a woman who would receive education would become a widow.¹⁶⁶ The missionaries wanted to remove these superstitions from the minds of the Hindus and tried to spread education among the females. The Baptist Missionaries believed that for implanting the Christian teachings in the Hindus it was necessary that the mother should be educated first.¹⁶⁷ They, therefore, established female schools in Serampore and its vicinity.¹⁶⁸ They did not make any distinction on ground of caste or class and therefore drew students from all classes; even the prostitutes joined their schools.¹⁶⁹ The Hindus of the locality helped the missionaries greatly in this venture. The number of female schools began to increase and in 1828, there were thirteen schools having two hundred fifty girl students.¹⁷⁰ Gradually, six schools were established at Birbhum and five in Dacca.¹⁷¹

But the first organised effort towards female education in Bengal was made by the Female Juvenile Society* founded

165. Ward, F.De, op cit p.188

166. Ibid

167. "Native Female Education", *Calcutta Review*, 1855, Vol. 25, pp. 65 & 66

168. Ibid.

169. Ibid, p.68

170. Ibid.

171. Lushington, C. *The History, Design and Present State of the Religious Benevolent and charitable Institutions.* pp. 188-89.

* In 1819, at the insistence of the Baptist Missionary Society, this society was established to promote female education in Bengal. It imparted knowledge in reading and writing along with needle work. Lady Loson and Lady Jones were appointed its secretaries.

in 1819.¹⁷² The Baptist Missionaries of Calcutta requested Lady Pears and Lady Loson, belonging to this society to open some schools for the females. Accordingly, the first school of the Society was established in Calcutta, named the Juvenile school. In the first year it had only eighty students but in the next year the number of its students increased.

The name of Miss Cooke (Later Lady Wilson, wife of Rev. Isaac Wilson of the Church Missionary Society) deserves special mention in connection with female education. She was deputed to India in 1821 by the Foreign School Society of London. She began her work under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society of Bengal and continued to work for a good number of years.¹⁷³ The instruction by an European lady was so much opposed at that time that Cooke was not allowed to enter into the women's apartments* of the rich people.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, she decided to educate the poor women and succeeded in drawing a good number of students. The students belonged to different castes, viz. Brahmin, Kayastha, Bagdi, and Chandal. During 1822-1823, she succeeded in starting schools at Thanthania, Kumartoli, Sobhabazar, Mullickbazar and Mirzapur.¹⁷⁵ These schools imparted teaching free of cost and they laid much emphasis on the vocational training of the students, such as lace making, knitting and cane work. In 1824, the Church Missionary Society had as many as twentyfour girls' schools under its supervision. But soon

172. Ibid, p. 185

173. Chapman, P. *Hindoo Female Education*, pp. 77-79 ; "Native Female Education", Calcutta Review, 1855, Vol. 25, p. 73

174. Bagal, J.C. *Bānglār Strī Siksha*, p.3

* Radhakanth Dev being the secretary of the Calcutta School Book Society opposed the idea.

175. Chapman, P. op cit., pp. 79-80.

on the 5th March, 1824, the task of supervision was entrusted to a committee of ladies.¹⁷⁶ This committee was known as Ladies Society for Native Female Education. Apart from the supervision of these schools, the Society also aimed at establishing a Central School.¹⁷⁷ This attempt was encouraged by the Hindus* and a Central school was established in 1826. This school had three hundred twenty Hindoo girls and seventy Christian girls who lived on the premises.¹⁷⁸ They were given instruction in spelling, reading writing, needle work along with religion. Some respectable Indian families sent their daughters to these schools. Rev. K.M. Banerjee was an ardent advocate of female education. He wrote in 1840 an essay on 'Indian Female Education' in which he emphasised the necessity of women education. Krishna Mohan expected that to enlighten the society mothers should get all facilities of life, "The education of women and their introduction into society will operate as a powerful check upon licentious practices."¹⁷⁹ He recommended "private tuition" under a well organised European native society than sending the girls to public schools. His advocacy greatly strengthened the cause of female education and the Hindu Society also began to realise its importance.*

176. Ibid. pp 85-86.

177. Ibid. p.86 ; Missionary Intelligence, January, 1827.

* Raja Baidyanath Mukherjee donated liberally on this occasion and the idea of establishing Central School was also appreciated by David Hare. (See Biographical Sketch of David Hare by P. C. Mitra, p. 74)

178. W.Adam's First Report pp. 48-49

179. Banerjee, K.M. *A Prize Essay on Native Female Education*, p. 64 & p. 67

* Men like Ramgopal Ghose, Debendranath and Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar joined the Bethune Society a few days later.

The Missionaries at that time felt that there should be well organised institutions through which their plan for female education should be executed. Accordingly, they established these agencies, viz, the Girls' day schools, Orphans' boarding establishments and domestic teaching arranged in the families of the middle and higher classes. These institutions drew students from lower ranks mostly from the Chandal, Hari, Dom, Bagdi, etc. By the forties of the nineteenth century the missionaries had twenty six girl schools having five hundred ninety students and twenty eight boarding schools having eight hundred thirty-six students.¹⁸⁰ The success of the missionaries helped to create a public opinion in favour of female education. Gyananesan published a letter on the 29th April, 1837, encouraging the determination of men like Motilal Seal and Haladhar Mullick to convene a meeting for devising the plan of female education.¹⁸¹ He also urged the people of Calcutta, Baranagar, Chinsurah and Shantipur to make organised efforts for establishing girls' schools in each village.¹⁸² Thus the Hindu Society began to view favourably the need of female education.

In 1848, J.E.D. Bethune, a scholar of Cambridge who had come to Calcutta as Law member was appointed the President of the Council of Education. He was very much interested in female education and with the help of Ramgopal Ghose, a famous Derozian, started the Hindu Balika Vidyalaya or Calcutta Female School in 1849 with twenty-one girls*.¹⁸³ In this school no religious instruction was given. It was probably because of this that it succeeded

180. Loc cit, *Calcutta Review*, 1861, Vol.16, p.242.

181. Banerjee, B.N. op. cit., vol. II, p, 71

182. Ibid, p.72

183. Selections from Educational Records, Part II, p.52

* The Sambād Prabhākar referred this school as Victoria Balika Vidyalaya

in attracting a good number of students from higher section of the society. A Pundit was appointed to teach Bengali and a Christian lady imparted vocational training. The school did not charge any tuition fees and distributed books free of cost to its students. Like Carey, Bethune also realised the usefulness of giving education through the medium of Bengali. Iswar Chandra Gupta, the editor of Samvad-Prabhākar hailed Bethune's endeavours and pointed out its usefulness to the society. This school became quite popular among the upper sections of the society. Pundit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar of the Sanskrit College lent his two daughters Kundamala and Bhuvanmala to this school and himself gave instruction there in Bengali without any remuneration.¹⁸⁴ This encouraged Raja Radhakanta Dev to establish a female school at his residence.¹⁸⁵ Gradually some other schools were also established at Jessore, Nabudhia and Suksagar, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, a disciple of Derozio and a Zamindar of Calcutta not only donated a site for a school in Mirzapur but also gave five thousand rupees in cash for the erection of a building.¹⁸⁶ Thus the missionaries succeeded in creating a favourable opinion for the spread of female education.

Economic ideas of the Missionaries :—

The Christian missionaries also gave their attention to the economic problems of the country, Ward studied the condition of the poor peasants and pointed out that although India was a fertile country and most of the people were engaged in agriculture, the actual tillers of the soil received negligible share of the crops, which was insufficient for their subsistence¹⁸⁷. In the absence of any provision for loan by

184. Ibid.

185. Bagal, J.C. *Unabinsa Satābdir Vangali*, p.77

186. *Sambād pūrnachandrodaya*, Bhādra 25, 1257, B.S.

187. Ward, W. A view of the History etc. Vol. I, pp 76-77

the Government for the improvement of agriculture and being unacquainted with the scientific devices for increasing the yield of the land, the cultivators continued the age long old method of cultivation¹⁸⁸. Thus the produce of the land did not increase and the cultivators were not in a position to keep grains in reserve for the next year. Moreover, the peasants worked hard in the field throughout the year but received a very little share of produce. In spite of this, they had to pay fixed revenue to the Zamindars and if they failed to do so, they were subjected to various kinds of torture¹⁸⁹.

James Long, of the Church Missionary Society felt the necessity of bringing about improvement in the method of cultivation. He was of the opinion that the miseries of the peasants were largely due to the indifference of the Zamindars to the interests of the peasants. The Zamindars left everything in the hands of the Naibs who for extracting money not only oppressed the peasants mercilessly but also deprived the Zamindars of the due share of revenue.¹⁹⁰ Long therefore advised the Zamindars of Bengal to take personal interest in the collection of revenue and in other affairs.

The Baptist Missionary Society also felt the need of the introduction of modern techniques for the improvement of agriculture. Carey founded the Agricultural and Horticultural Society on the 14th September, 1820 for devising ways and means for the promotion of agriculture.¹⁹¹ The museum of the Society contained various kinds of wood, dying and tanning materials. Carey even started an Agri-

188. Carey, W. *Cerir Kathopokathan*, pp. 171-177

189. Ibid, p, 205 : Ghose, B. *Smayik patre etc.* Vol II, pp. 109-115

190. James, L. *Five hundred Questions on the Social conditions of the Natives.* pp 4-5

cultural society, the chief aim of which was to encourage the peasants and Zamindars in bringing about improvement in agriculture.¹⁹² The Society also drew the attention of the Government towards the necessity of reclaiming the fallow and waste lands. It was however, not able to make a significant achievement because of the indifferent attitude of the Zamindars.¹⁹³

The missionaries welcomed the settlement of Europeans in Bengal as they felt that they would introduce modern methods and equipments in agriculture which would greatly improve production.¹⁹⁴ They thought that new techniques of cultivation and provision of better irrigation facilities would be conducive to the interests of poor peasants. The missionaries also believed that agricultural production would improve under European landowners and greater security would be enjoyed by the peasants.

The missionaries repeatedly drew the attention of the Government to the immense possibilities of Bengal. They were constrained to find that the agricultural capabilities of the provinces were being wasted on account of lack of adequate irrigational facilities.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, the products of Bengal could not be marketed from one part of the province to another because of inadequate transport arrangements. The missionaries found that the Damodar and the other rivers were not navigable except during the rainy season. So they suggested that canals should be dug for providing water transport. Better transport facilities were, likely to increase the supply of coal and iron, which would

191. Carey, W. *The Good old days of the Hon'ble John Company*, Vol. I p 419

192. *Friend of India*, 1820, (Qtly series) Nos. 1-4 p. 54

193. Ibid

164. Ward, W F. De, op cit, p. 200.

195. *Friend of India*, April 25, 1838, p.260.

help the growth of industry and consequently bring prosperity to Bengal.¹⁹⁶

The missionaries were also interested in land revenue which was the major source of revenue to the Government. They found that large tracts of land had been given to Pundits, Brahmins and Maulavis free of tax.¹⁹⁷ The lands were generally assigned to them for the establishment of *Tols* (sanskrit teaching centres), temples and *madarsas*. Besides, land had also been given at certain places to the carpenters, goldsmiths and milkmaids and others on a very small amount of rent.¹⁹⁸ They kept vast areas uncultivated, which was very uneconomical as good lands remained fallow and the Government was deprived of the revenue as they paid normal rent for the land. Therefore, the missionaries started an agitation of rent free lands. The contemporary periodicals and journals like the *Friend of India* and the *Samachar Darpan* began to create public opinion in favour of the resumption of rent free lands. They made demand for resumption on the following grounds:¹⁹⁹

(a) That vast tracts of rent free lands (popularly known as *debottar* lands) caused loss of revenue to the Government. If they were resumed the revenue of the Government would immensely increase.

(b) That such tenures which had defective titles because of which there were disputes between the Zamindars and the owners of land should lapse to the Government.

(c) That in all rent free lands the Zamindars over and above his own share took the share of the Government. Thus the Government was deprived of its rightful share. Probably the agitation of the missionaries brought home to

196. Ibid.

197. Roy, K. C. *Kshitishbansāvalicharit*, pp 6-7.

198. Ibid.

199. *Samāchār Darpan*, December 31, 1836 and Oct. 21, 1837.

the Government the necessity of resuming rent free lands. Accordingly, in 1828 the law was passed for the resumption of rent free lands. This enactment was very much criticised by the Zamindars of Bengal, who formed organisations like *Banga-bhāsā Prakāsikā Sābhā* (a literary organisation) and the land holders' Association to protest against this measure.²⁰⁰

We do not have a full knowledge of what the missionaries thought of the Permanent Settlement of 1793. But we get an indication of their attitude in this respect from the observation which they made with regard to the settlement of Western Provinces.²⁰¹ While commenting on the land settlement of the Western Provinces, they commended the Permanent Settlement of Bengal in so far as it gave a correct and accurate knowledge of the revenue payable to the Zamindars. They felt that the settlement of Western Provinces was of a temporary nature as it was likely to be reviewed at certain intervals. Hence the revenue of the Western Provinces was likely to fluctuate, whereas in case of Bengal it was fixed. So the missionaries suggested that the permanent settlement of Bengal should be introduced in Western Provinces as well as it would increase the revenue of the Government and the Zamindar would take more interest in improving their estates.²⁰² They pointed out that the forests of Bengal had been converted

200. Ibid. December 14, 1835

*The *Banga Bhāsā Prakāsikā Sābhā* which aimed at improving the Bengali language, in course of time began to discuss political questions also. (for details see *Vāṅglār Navya Sanskriti* by J. C. Bagal, pp. 16-17.)

Land Holders' Association : In 1838, Dwarkanath Tagore established this association with the object of protecting the rights and interests of Zamindars.

201. Ibid, Nov. 19, 1836.

202. Ibid

into cultivable land only after the introduction of the permanent settlement there.

During the period under review, Indigo constituted one of the principal products of India.²⁰³ As the export trade in Indigo was very profitable, the indigo merchants forced the cultivators to enter into contracts for more than they could produce. On failure to supply the stipulated quantity the cultivators were greatly harassed by the contractors and their agents.²⁰⁴ So the missionaries suggested that indigo cultivation in India should be conducted by European planters. A letter on 12th May, 1832 was published in the *Samachar Darpan* which supported the colonisation of European planters on the ground that the condition of the cultivators under European planters would be better of as they would offer higher remuneration and better facilities.²⁰⁵

The question of export and import duties also attracted the attention of the missionaries. They found that export and import duties were iniquitous. There were heavy duties on exports but very light duties on imports²⁰⁶. It should be remembered that the Industrial Revolution had taken place in England by that time and therefore, British goods were admitted to India on payment of a very nominal duty. This not only adversely affected India's balance of trade but also killed her industries; the hand made goods of India could

203. Ibid. May 23, 1816; *Digdarshan*, May 1818, p.29

204. Roy, K. C. op. cit., p. 13

205. *Samāchār Darpan* May 12, 1832. *But we also get a contradictory statement regarding this view. When the clonogesian society (a society of the Europeans for cultivating Indian lands) was established, the missionaries remarked that the incoming of white peasants would destroy the peaceful country life. see *Sambād patre*. etc. Vol. I, p.116)

206. Ibid.

not compete with the machine made goods of the West. The worst sufferer was the cotton industry. Nothing was done by the Government for giving protection to this industry and so the plight of the weavers was miserable. Reference may be made in this connection to a letter published in the *Sāmāchar Darpan* on January 5, 1828. In it, a widow from Shantipur reported that she used to maintain a family of four members by selling threads spun by Charkha.²⁰⁷ But the heavy import of mill-made thread had completely thrown her out of employment. The anomalies were noticed by the missionaries who brought these to the attention of the Government.

The setback in agriculture, trade and communication had led to the rapid fall of Government revenue. So the missionaries suggested that the loss of revenue might be compensated by levying taxes on liquor.²⁰⁸ It was argued that a small tax on liquor would control the consumption of liquor and at the same time increase the revenue of the Government. Similarly, to augment the revenue of the Government they also suggested to place ferries under efficient superintendence.²⁰⁹ The ferries formed one of the most important sources of public revenue but due to lax superintendence the revenue which they ought to have yielded was usurped by private individuals. So the missionaries suggested that if any special officer was entrusted with the duty of collecting ferry taxes the revenue would greatly increase.

The missionaries were also opposed to the manufacture of salt by the Zamindars, as it would entail loss of revenue to the Government.²¹⁰ It should be remembered that from 1772 the East India Company enjoyed a monopoly over the

207. Banerjee, B. N. op., cit., Vol. I, p. 110.

208. *Friend of India*, October 29, 1840 p.690.

209. Ibid.

210. Banerjee, B. N. op. cit. Vol. I p. 107

production of Salt.²¹¹ This was a very profitable business and the revenue from salt formed one tenth of the total revenue. That is why the missionaries were not in favour of permitting the Zamindars to manufacture salt privately.

The christian missionaries also severely criticised that provision of the Hindu succession law which precluded from inheritance to family property those persons who got converted to christianity. According to the prevalent law only those persons could inherit the family property who performed certain religious rites to their dead ancestors. But this acted as a kind of restraint upon the wealthy Hindus who wanted to embrace Christianity. Therefore, Carey, Duff and Krishna Mohan Banerjee made a protest against this to the Government.²¹² This in all probability weighed heavily with the Government when they decided to pass the Act of 1832 which was implemented in 1850 by the famous Civil Disabilities Removal Act.²¹³

CHAPTER V

The Brahmo Movement

Rammohun Roy (1774-1833)

and Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905)

The first half of the nineteenth century in Bengal witnessed the emergence of a religious reform movement which ultimately brought a marked change in the ideas and the structure of the society in Bengal. This movement was initiated by Raja Rammohun Roy and is famous as Brahmo movement.

211. Banerjee P. N. *Indian Finance in the Days of the Company*, Chap. V
212. Parliamentary Papers, H/c, 1851, Vol. 41, No. 35 ; Marshman, J. C. op. cit., vol II, pp. 456-457
213. Majumdar, R. C. *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance* Vol. 9, p. 422

Rammohun, the son of Ramkanta Roy, a rich Brahmin landowner of village Radhanagar in the Hooghly district, was born in 1774. Nothing very definite about the boyhood of Rammohun is known, but this much is known that he was proficient in Sanskrit and Persian languages. He was very intelligent and possessed a keen and sensitive mind. He was deeply moved by the religious abuses and social injustice prevalent in Bengal during that time.

Bengal in the last quarter of the eighteenth century was engulfed in gross superstition. Illiteracy and ignorance had prevailed. The Brahmins had fallen from their tradition and were unable to lead the society morally or intellectually. Manasā, Sitalā and Kālī were popular deities, and the mode of worshipping these goddesses had been vulgarised to suit popular tastes. Belief in the efficacy of magic, spell and witch craft formed an important part of religion. Sacrificing infants in the name of religion and the burning of the widows along with the dead bodies of their husbands, were regarded as pious acts. Polygamy and Kulin system of marriage had debased the social standard of morals. Pursuit of learning and acquisition of knowledge were confined to only a few centres where the right thinking Pundits had gathered. Those who stayed isolated in their villages remained in perpetual fear of insult and injury by the wealthy and brutes.¹ The wealthy people squandered their time and money on cock-fighting, dancing-girls and wanton display of their wealth during Durgā-pūjā and marriages. The society was divided into two distinct classes of people namely, the wealthy landed aristocracy and the poor unprotected peasantry who paid for the debauchery and licentious life led in pomp and pleasure by the former. Liquor and narcotics had eaten up the vitals of the society. The standards of the society had sunken very low.

1. Sastri, S. N., *History of the Brahmo Samaj* Vol. I, p. 2.

Rammohun, although very young in age, at once revolted against the existing social and religious degradation, and strongly differed with his father's opinion on idolatry for which, it is said, he was expelled from house by his father. However, Rammohun travelled far and wide and after some years settled at Rangpore in North Bengal, in the service of the East India Company. Meantime, he had mastered the Vedas, Upanishads, Vedanta, Smritis, Purānas and Tantras. He had also studied the Korān and the Muslim law.² He was impressed by the monotheistic ideas in the Koran and in the writings of some scholars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³

From 1797, Rammohun visited Calcutta regularly. He learnt English and read the works of some free thinkers like Thomas Paine, Hume and Voltaire. All these helped him to realise and distinguish between true concept of religion and superstitious beliefs.*

In 1815, he finally settled down in his Maniktola residence in Calcutta. Here he saw different aspects of life. He found that idolatry was universally prevalent and sati was widely performed as a part of religion.⁴ In 1815, some 398 widows were burnt along with their husbands in Calcutta Division alone. The monotheistic idea of religion which he had so long nourished in his mind now found proper time for expression. He soon realised that Calcutta was the proper place to start a crusade against idolatry and sati. For disseminating his views, he adopted four methods.

2. Ibid., p. 17.

3. Sen K. M., "Yugaguru Rammohun", *Viswabharati Patrika* (Sravan-Aswin), 1358 B, S,

4. Collet, S, D, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, p 258

* His article Tufal-tul-Muwauddin, in Persian, came out in 1803.

These were, (a) publication of books and tracts. (b) Conversation and debates (c) establishment of religious association (d) spread of knowledge through schools. Now Rammohun devoted serious attention to his religious and philosophical pursuits. He met Hariharananda Tirthaswami, a Tantrika sanyasi and read Sanskrit afresh under his guidance. He also gathered a good knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, the languages in which the old Testament and New Testament were written.

For propagating his views and religious discussions, he started the Atmiya Sabha in 1815.⁵ During the years 1816-19 he published the Bengali translation of the five principal Upanishads viz., *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Mundaka* and *Mandukya*. Among these five, the first four were translated in English by Rammohun himself. He admitted in this preface to the translation of the *Ishopanishad* that besides the Vedanta, the Puranas and the Tantras should also be regarded as Shastras for they also declare "God to be one and above the apprehension of external and internal senses." The worship of the One Invisible Supreme Being was according to all Hindu shastras the purest form of divine worship and it was enjoined not only on ascetics but also on householders."⁶ He also argued that the prevalent system of idol worship can never be sanctioned on the ground that it was based on custom. Keeping all this in mind, he first of all translated the *Vedānta Sutra* in Bengali in 1815, under the title *Vedānta Grantha*. In it, he explained the meaning of the sutras in simple Bengali and through this book he wanted to establish the unity of the 'Supreme Being' and that He is the

5. Banerjee, B. N. "Societies founded by Rammohun Roy for religious reform", *Modern Review*, April, 1935.

6. Nag and Burman (Ed), op. cit., Part 11, pp. 4-45.

only object of worship.⁷ At this time, two other smaller tracts were also composed. They were *Gayatri Artha* (1818) and *Atmanatma Viveka*. In the former, he emphasised the importance of the use of *gayatri*. He maintained that *gayatri* was the simple medium to reach the Brahman.⁸ The other was a translation of Sankaracharya's work. In the same year, he was reported to have brought out a Bengali translation of the *Brihadaranyaka* and *Chondogya* Upanishads, but these works have not been traced as yet.

In 1816, he published the *Abridgement of the Vedanta* both in English and Bengali. This was published in order to remove the misconceptions of the Christian-missionaries about Hinduism and also with a view to preach the idea of worshipping god in spirit.⁹ In 1816, he translated the *Kena* and *Isha* Upanishads and in 1817 the *Katha* and *Mandakya* Upanishads. He distributed many copies of these books free of cost. These were all his preparations for his ensuing campaign against idolatry and after 1816 he finally made a direct attack on the prevalent conservatism and orthodoxy in society.

In the Atmiya Sabha rich and influential persons, who had already come in contact with English education gathered round Rammohun. But when Rammohun openly began to preach the doctrine of monotheism, some of them deserted him. However, the most prominent members were Dwarkanath Tagore of Jorsanko, Nandakishore Bose (father of Rajnarain Bose), Brindaban Mitra, (grandfather of Rajendralal Mitra), Prasanna Kumar Togore (Zamindar of Pathuriaghata), Kalishankar Ghosal,

7. Banerjee, B. N. and Das, S. K. (Ed.) *Rammohun Granthavali*, Vol. 1, pp. 25, 37 and 52.
8. Ghose, J. C. (Ed.) *English works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, Vol. 1, p. 114.
9. Banerjee, B. N. and Das, S. K. (Ed.) op. cit., pp. 123-125.

Baidyanath Mukherjee (the first Secretary of the Hindu College), Ananda Prasad Banerjee of Telinipara, Ramchandra Vidyabagish, etc.¹⁰ The meetings were held once a week. Texts from the Vedas were recited and Brahmo Sangeet composed by Rammohun himself were sung.¹¹ But the Sabhā did not discuss only religious matters. It held also discussions on polygamy, burning of widows, restriction on diet etc.¹²

The Meetings were at first held regularly at his Manikola garden house and then it was shifted to his Simla house.¹³

The meetings of the Sabha created great sensation in the Calcutta society. Jay Krishna who had left the organisation began to spread a rumour that calves were slaughtered there and there were many others who ridiculed its attempts. Rammohun's translation of the Upanishads and their distribution among all sections of people greatly agitated the conservative Brahmin class. His chief opponent was Shankar Sastri, the Head English Teacher of the Madras Government College. He wrote a letter to Rammohun controverting the Raja's view, which was published in the Madras Courier, December, 1816. Rammohun replied to this in a tract entitled *A Defence of Hindu Theism* (1817). In it, he maintained that in all his works hitherto published he had urged that the doctrine of the unity of godheads was real Hinduism.¹⁴ He remarked that the various ceremonial rites which were associated with Idolatry were against all moral principles. He also showed that the love songs composed in appreciation of Krishna and

10. Collet, S. D. op. cit., p. 68.
11. Tatattwabodhini Patrika, Ashwin, 1769 Sak.
12. Asiatic Journal, May, 1819.
13. Sastri, S. N. op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 27-28.
14. Roy, R. M. *In Defence of Hindu Theism*, pp. 3-9 & 13.

various crimes committed during *Kālīpūjā* (worship of Kali) were not sanctioned by the Vedas.

Another defender of Hinduism, Mrityunjoy Vidyalkar, the Head Pundit of the Fort William College, published a tract entitled *Vedanta Chandrika* (1817). In it, he tried to defend polytheism and idolatry. Rammohun gave his reply in his tract entitled *A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas*. In it, Rammohun maintained that idolatry was not only opposed to the teachings of the shastras but also against ethics and social well-being.

During 1816-18, Rammohun wrote two polemical tracts. These were *Utsavananda Vidyabugisher Sahit Vichar* (1816-1817) and *Goswami Sahit Vichar* (1818). Besides writing religious tracts, he entered into a religious debate with Subramhanya Sastri, a Madras Brahmin. This debate took place on idol worship at the meeting of the Atmiya Sabha. Rammohun published the gist of the debate under the title *An Appeal for the Pursuit of Final Beautitude Independently of Brahmanical Observance** (1820).¹⁵ In this treatise, he wanted to establish that the study of the Vedas and the strict observances of all the rites and duties prescribed therein were not "indispensable steps towards attaining divine knowledge." In support of his argument, he pointed out that the man who professed no religion was also permitted to acquire the knowledge of God. His success in the debate made his opponents much infuriated.

During the year 1820, a new phase started in the career of Rammohun when he turned his attention towards Christianity. His interest in Christianity dated back to his association with John Digby at Rangpur.** The intimacy

15. Banerjee, B. N. and Das, S. K. op. cit., Part II, pp. 98-100.

* This tract was translated under the title *Subramhanya Sastri Sahit Vichar*.

** Digby was the Collector of Revenue at Rangpur between 1809-1815.

with Digby had given him an opportunity to study the Bible and to know something of Christian theology. He also came in contact with the Serampore missionaries since 1816.¹⁶ The Raja had found support of his belief in the existence of One God in the Upanishds and the Koran and now he sought additional support to his belief from the Bible. As said earlier, he had already learnt Hebrew, Greek and Latin. After making a deep study of the New Testament, he wrote *Precepts of Jesus* (1820). It consisted chiefly of extracts from the New Testament.¹⁷ These extracts embodied the main teachings of Christianity which were (1) That love to God is manifested in our doing good to our fellow beings, (2) That God who is the only proper object of worship is one and undivided in person, (3) That God is omnipotent.

Rammohun read the Bible with admiration but he could not help noticing contradictions in it. He found that undeliverable miracles had been associated with the name of Jesus. He also did not accept Trinitarianism of Christianity. He therefore omitted many miracles in his compilation. Rammohun had compiled the book with a view that the teachings of Christ "would tend to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions."¹⁸ This publication of the Raja created hopes in the minds of the Christians, that the Raja might be converted. Bishop Middleton tried his best to induce Rammohun to embrace Christianity.¹⁹ But he met with disappointment. This happened shortly after the publication of the *Precepts of Jesus*. Rammohun's omission of miracles was now greatly resented by the

16. *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. VI, pp. 106-109.

17. Ghose, J. C. (Ed.) op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 10-35.

18. Ghose, J. C. (Ed.) op. cit., Vol. III p. 110

19. Collet, S. D. op. cit., p. 125.

Serampore missionaries and he was severely criticised in the *Friend of India*.*

It was argued by Rev. Schmid of the Church Missionary Society that the Precept might greatly injure the cause of truth. The Baptist missionaries were so much infuriated that Marshman publicly called Rammohun 'a heathen'. This greatly hurt Rammohun. He published another tract entitled, *An Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus* (1820). In it, he defended himself with much spirit against the charges of the missionaries, and claimed himself to be a believer not only in the One True God but also in the truths revealed in the Christian scriptures.²⁰ He, however, was critical of the way in which the missionaries were trying to propagate the Christian faith. He criticised the free distribution of the Bible and of money for alluring people to embrace Christianity.²¹ He firmly maintained that the moral principles and precepts of Christianity were of much greater value than its miracles, and dogmas to which the Baptist missionaries had attached so much value.

This idea of Rammohun again elicited certain satirical remarks from Marshman who commented that the rejection of the miracle as false would give the impression that Jesus was an impostor and liar, and in that case the "Precepts of Jesus" by Rammohun could not be set before mankind as a sure guide to peace and happiness.²²

Rammohun met this criticism in his *Second Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus* (1821). In it, he expressed that though he believed in

* The *Friend of India* (monthly series) February, 1820, pp. 23-31, and September 1820, pp. 88-119.

20. Nag and Burman, op. cit., part 5, p. 57.

21. Ibid.

22. *Friend of India* (Qtly. series) Sept. 1820, pp. 125-130.

Christian theology, he had rejected the interpretation of the Christian doctrine of atonement given by Marshman, and refused to identify Christ with God. He also opposed the doctrines of Trinitarianism.²³ He maintained that Polytheism and Trinitarianism were essentially the same thing. In evincing the truth and excellences of the Precepts of Jesus, he did not consider it necessary to take the aid of metaphysical arguments.

In 1821, the Baptist Missionaries published a letter criticising Hindu Shastras.*²⁴ They also refused to publish the reply of Rammohun in the columns of the *Samachar Darpan*. Then the Raja was forced to start a journal named the *Brahmanical Magazine*²⁵ (1821). In it, he tried to show that the religious doctrines of the Vedas were much more rational than those which the missionaries professed. It was also argued by him that the religious rites preached in the Puranas and the Tantras though unreasonable was not that irrational as the Trinitarian faith.²⁶ He called the Trinitarian Christianity no better than Hindu polytheism. In defence of the Vedanta, the Raja said that Maya was an attribute of God.²⁷ He also stated in it that God was formless and not conceivable to human minds. Any idea contradictory to this fundamental concept of God had never received universal acknowledgement. The Puranas, the Rāmāyana or the Mahābhārat described God in human forms for persons incapable of appreciating the formlessness of God.²⁸

23. Ghose, J. C. (Ed.) op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 217-219.

24. *Samachar Darpan*, July 14, 1821.

* This point is also explained in the Chapter on Christianity.

25. Nag and Burman, op. cit., Part V, pp. 13, 22, 24.

26. Ibid., pp. 25-28.

27. Ghose, J. C. op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 15, 16 and 215.

28. Ibid., pp. 228-230.

In 1821, Rammohun with the help of Adam undertook the translation of the Four Gospels in Bengali and also formed the Calcutta Unitarian Committee. Rammohun, N. Karr and some other Indians and Europeans were its members. The object of this Committee was the diffusion and spread of Unitarian doctrine. Through this Committee Rammohun came into contact with several prominent Unitarians of England and the U. S. A. most prominent among them being Rev. Henry Ware and Dr. T. Ross. The London Unitarian Committee complimented Rammohun for the formation of the Committee in India. But the Unitarian movement of Rammohun did not succeed.

The controversy of Rammohun with the missionaries again renewed with the publication of Second Appeal to the Christian in 1821. Marshman replied to this in the *Friend of India*, December 1821.³⁰ In it, he made an attempt to defend the traditional Christian doctrine of atonement and doctrine of Trinity. *The Final Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus*, was written by Rammohun in 1823. It was published in the Unitarian Press in January 1823.³¹ The "Final Appeal" refuted Marshman's arguments with proofs from the Bible. This, however did not satisfy Rammohun. He invited earnest defenders of Christianity to argue with him. This challenge drew Tytler, a teacher of the Hindu College and later on the Superintendent of the

29. Sanyal, S. C. "The Rev. William Adam," *Bengal Past and Present*, (January-June) 1914, pp. 252-53.

30. *Friend of India*, (Quarterly series) December, 1821 pp. 501-628.

31. Chakraborty, S. C. (Ed.) *The Father of Modern India*, part II, p. 15.

* The whole controversy was published by Rammohun in the form of a pamphlet under the name of *A Vindication of the Incarnation of the Deity*.

Medical College, Calcutta, into bitter controversy in the pages of Bengal Harkaru.³² Tytler was not a good scholar, so Rammohun defeated him easily. Some months after, *A Dialogue between a Missionary and the Three Chinese Converts* came. It was a satire on the doctrine of Trinity.³³ Rammohun tried to describe in the small tract the confused impression produced on the minds of three Chinese converts by the teachings of the Trinitarian doctrine of three gods. The fourth and the final issue of *Brahmanical Magazine* was published on the 15th November, 1823, the publication of which made his cause stronger. In it, he repudiated the charge of atheism levelled by a missionary writer. In retaliation, he vehemently attacked the Christian doctrine of Trinity and atonement.³⁴ From the different versions, of the Trinity presented by the missionaries, he came to the conclusion that such a doctrine was not contradictory in itself but was sufficient to puzzle and drive a man to theism.³⁵

Another tract entitled, *Humble Suggestion to his Countrymen who Believe in the One True God* was published in 1823. In it, he advised the monotheists to be friendly to men of all religions.³⁶

The whole study of Rammohun's relation with Christianity shows that he had great faith and regard for the humanitarian aspect of religion. In a letter to Digby, he stated, "The consequence of my long uninterrupted researches into religious truths has been that I found the doctrines of Christ mere conducive to moral principles and better adopted for the use of rational beings rather than any other

32. Ghose, J. C. op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 136-138

33. Banerjee, B. N. and Das, S. K. op. cit., pp. 22-23

34. Nag and Burman, op. cit., Part II, pp. 77-79.

35. Ibid., pp. 180-182.

36. Ghose, J. C. op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 297-299.

which have come to my knowledge".³⁷ His close contact with the missionaries invariably influenced him to borrow something of the Christians. The establishment of the Brahmo-Sabha and the congregational worship was a clear example of it.

During the year 1820-1823, Rammohun not only attacked Trinitarianism but continued his attack on Hindu-orthodoxy as well. In 1820, the *Brahma Pauttalik Samvad* was published. In it, he again criticised the Hindu practice of idolatry, for removing which he appealed to reason.³⁸ The tract was published under the name of one Brajamohan. It enjoyed great popularity.

During his controversy with the Christian missionaries, Rammohun realised that his task of establishing One True God and of removing vague notions about religion had not been completed. So, he composed four polemical tracts during 1820-1823. In *Kabitakarer Sahit Vichar* (1820) he maintained that the worship of One God which he had so long been trying to popularise was in full consonance with the ancient religious scriptures of the Hindus including the Smritis and Puranas.³⁹ In the *Samachar Darpan* of April 6, 1822, several questions were put to Rammohun by an anonymous writer. The writer charged him of unorthodox attitude towards religion. He replied to this in the tract *Chari Prasener Uttar*. In it, Rammohun argued that neither he nor his opponent observed the true shastric principles. He contended that True religion consisted in the knowledge of God and in the performance of beneficial works for men.⁴⁰ The Tantras under certain conditions had permitted the eating of flesh and drinking of wine. So these could not be branded as irreligious practices. The

37. Nag and Burman, op. cit., Part IV, pp. 94-95.

38. Banerjee, B. N. and Das, S. K. op. cit., pp. 10-15.

39. Ibid., Part II, pp. 88-89.

40. Ibid., Part II, pp. 9-14.

Saiva form of marriage though somewhat irregular could not be branded as irreligious.⁴¹

In answer to this tract, a rejoinder appeared in the *Samachar Darpan*. Rammohun was accused of drinking wine and other vices. Rammohun replied to it in his tract *Pathy Pradan*. He pointed out that the Hindu religion did not consist in the strict observance of rituals but in the pursuit of knowledge of God; the attainment of true knowledge destroyed all sins previously committed by man.⁴²

Another polemical tract *Guru-Paduka* was composed by Rammohun in answer to *Gyananjana-Salaka*, a tract written in defence of idolatry. The orthodox Hindus published some letters showing that idolatry was an old custom of the Hindus and this should be maintained. A crushing reply was given by Rammohun to his opponent and they were silenced.⁴³

Rammohun did not want to introduce any new religion; he only wanted to get back Hinduism in its pristine purity. He accepted the monotheism of the Upanishads, the non-idolatrous element of the Koran and equality of men from the Bible. Thus he formed a new vision of God as Invisible, Imperceptible and Omnipotent. He also held that God was shapeless. His spirit was the guiding spirit of the Universe. A Brahmo must have faith in the One Supreme Being, faith in the existence of soul and in the immortality of soul. This was the picture of Rammohun's faith. Now he gave it a concrete shape.

Rammohun's regular visit to the Unitarian society with Adam was not liked by his friends, Tarachand Chakraborty and Chandra Sakhar Dev.⁴⁴ He, therefore, founded the Brahmo Sabha in the house of Kamal Lochan Vasu in Chilt-

41. Ibid., p. 19.

42. Ibid., pp. 30-35.

43. Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 7-20.

44. Collet, S. D. op. cit., p. 220.

pore Road.⁴⁵ (August 20, 1828). The Trust-Deed or the religious document of the Sabha embodied that the Sabha was to be used as a place of public meeting for all persons without any distinction of caste and creed for the worship of the "Eternal, Unsearchable, Immutable Being" and that no "graven image, statue or sculpture, curving, painting picture, portrait or the likeness or anything shall be admitted within the said building, nor any sacrifice or religious rituals even permitted therein."⁴⁶ Ramchandra Vidyabagish was appointed the first Superintendent of the Samaj.⁴⁷ Wednesday was fixed as the day of universal gathering.⁴⁸ Two South Indian Brahmins used to recite the Upanishad and Ramchandra used to explain the religion. It completed with the *Brahmo-Sangeet* sung by Vishnu Chandra Chakraborty.⁴⁹

The Brahmo-faith, in its inception was accepted mostly by the followers and friends of Rammohun. While engaged in organising the Sabha, the Raja composed one more tract *Anustan* (1829). It dealt with the nature of worship which he wanted to inculcate. He also emphasised that no particular place was necessary for worshipping the One God. Worship should be conducted without observance of any ritual.⁵⁰

The opening of the new Theistic society roused the orthodox section of the Hindu society. They organised the Dharma-Sabha with the aim to defend Hinduism from the impending danger of non-idolatrous monotheistic religion.⁵¹

45. Sastri, S. N. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 39.

46. *Tattwabodhind Patriki*, Magh, 1772 Sak,

47. Ibid., Baisakh, 1767 Sak.

48. Tagore, D.N. *Panchavinsati Batsarer Parikshita Vritwanta* p. 17.

49. Ghose, B. *Samayik patre*, etc. Vol. II, pp. 680-684.

50. Ghose, J.C. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 189.

51. Banerjee, B.N. *Samvad patre* etc. Vol. II, pp. 412-413.

The Dharma-Sabha was so hostile towards the Brohmo-Sabha that it did not even spare the supporters of the Raja. Babu Mathuranath Mullick was an intimate friend of Rammohun and he supported his cause. But the Dharma-Sabha declared that any man joining the marriage-ceremony in the family of Mathuranath Mullick would be socially boycotted.⁵² At one time, the hostility of the Dharma-Sabha became so severe that some of its members even tried to kill Rammohun.

Rammohun had left for England in 1830 to present Indian case before the British Parliament on the eve of the renewal of the Company's Charter. After the departure of Rammohun till Debendranath joined the Brahmo Samaj, it was without any leader. Dwarakanath, father of Debendranath though not a member of the Samaj supervised its work from outside and rendered financial assistance periodically for the regular functioning of the Samaj. Many persons assembled in the prayer hall of the Samaj, but only a few of them took active part in its work. The ideals of Rammohun were almost lost.⁵³ The low caste Hindus were not allowed to become members of the Samaj. 'Avatarbad' used to be preached from the pulpit of the Samaj. The task of reforming the Samaj and accelerating its progress fell upon Debendranath when he joined it in 1842.

Rammohun had great affection for Debendranath. Before his departure he had tenderly pressed the hands of Debendranath, then a young boy of ten. In later years, Debendranath interpreted this gesture of Rammohun as a sign of investing great responsibility which eventually was to come on him.⁵⁴

In his boyhood Debendranath was very much attached

52. Ibid., p. 413.

53. Roy Choudhury, G.S. "Maharshi Debendranath", *Narayan*, Vaisakh, 1327 B.S.

54. *Six Leaders of the Brahmo Samaj*, p. 69.

to his paternal grandmother. As long as she lived she guided him spiritually and morally. With her passing away Debendranath felt a strange sense of unreality, he felt no temptation for material world, "Life was dreary, the world was like a graveyard. I found happiness in nothing."⁵⁵

After the death of his grandmother, Debendranth absorbed himself into the study of Sanskrit and western Philosophy. Slowly he began to realise that with the knowledge of the outer world one could know about his inner self.⁵⁶ He realised the God's presence in nature. The sight of the sky studded with innumerable stars made him conscious of the presence of the Infinite; he felt that God was eternal omnipotent and formless.

Accidentally, one day he came across a page of the Upanishad, on which was written the word "Isavasyamidam sarvam".⁵⁷ (i.e., God pervades everywhere) Ramchandra Vidyabagish explained to him the meaning of it. He felt so much inspired by this expression that he read one by one *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katka* *Mundaka* and *Mrndukya* Upanishads. He said "Every word of the Upanishads tended to enlighten my mind. With their help I advanced my appointed path."⁵⁸

This event led Debendranath to establish the Tattwabodhini Sabha on October 6, 1839.⁵⁹ It was established with the object of disseminating the knowledge of the Shastras and the knowledge of the Brahma as inculcated in the Vedanta. At first, the name of the association was Tattwaranjini Sabha; later it was named as Tattwabodhini Sabha. It became very popular among the educated circles of Calcutta. It first started with ten members but in 1846

the membership rose to eight hundred.⁶⁰ It was popular among English educated youngmen of the time. There was much in common the aims of Tattwabodhini Sabha and that of the Brahmo Sabha, and therefore, both the organisations were amalgamated into 1859.⁶¹ The list of the members of Tattwabodhini Sabha included the names of Ramtanu Lahiri, Rajnarain Basu, Rajendra Lal Mitra, Akshay Kumar Dutta, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Ram Gopal Ghose and many others.⁶² These men were the leaders of newly rising educated middle class of Bengal.

Besides fighting idolatry and superstitions in an organised way, the Sabha also aimed at the cultural advancement of the country.⁶³ The activities of the Sabha may be divided under six different heads, viz., (a) Reconstruction of the Brahmo Samaj.

- (b) diffusion and discussion of Brahmo Samaj.
- (c) discussion on Indology.
- (d) discussion of Bengali language and literature and diffusion of knowledge through the medium of Bengali.
- (e) mobilisation of public opinion against missionary attacks.
- (f) discussion of politics indirectly.

Debendranath urged his countrymen to revive their old cultural heritage through the study and culture of the Vedas and Upanishads. He deprecated the tendency of the Bengali young men paying more attention to the study of English than to the Bengali language. He requested Rajnarain Vasu to translate the Upanishads into Bengali. To discuss and ventilate the opinions of the Sabha, the Tattwa-

55. *Autobiography of Maharshi Debendranath* p.10.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid., p.16.

58. Ibid.

59. *Tattwabodhini Patrika*. Aswin. 1837 Sak.

60. Ibid, Magh, 1768 Sak.

61. Bagal, J C. *Banglar Navya Sanskriti*, p.29.

62. Biswas, D. "Debendranath O Tattwabodhini Sabha" *Itihas*, (Bhadra-Kartik), 1361 B. S.

63. Ibid.

bodhini Patrika was brought out under the editorship of Akshay Kumar Dutta. Debendranath also established Tattwabodhini Pathshala in Bansberia in order to remove ignorance among the people.⁶⁴

While Debendranath was engaged in the work associated with the Tattwabodhini Sabha, the members of the Brahmo Samaj were being ridiculed as 'half-liberals.' The Dharma-Sabha began to criticise the work of the Samaj, and the Christian missionaries, especially the group headed by Alexander Duff began to attack the basis of Hinduism.* Debendranath first felt the need of reorganising the samaj. He had by this time joined the Brahmo Samaj (1843). In order to remove casteism from the samaj, he permitted the low-caste Hindus to enter the prayer hall while the Vedas were being chanted. He prohibited the preaching of the *avatarbad* from the pulpit of the samaj.⁶⁵ With a view to revitalising the samaj Debendranath directed that only those who would take a vow to renounce idolatry and resolve to worship one God, would be admitted to the Samaj. With this end in view, he drew up a code for initiation into the Samaj.⁶⁶ All these greatly helped to reorganise the Samaj and now Debendranath thought it proper to make religious-researches into the basis of Brahmoism.

The religion in which the Brahmos were initiated was "the true religion inculcated in the Vedanta." Debendranath prescribed that this was to be performed by means of *Gayatri*.⁶⁷ But later on, he realised that this was difficult for ordinary men to follow. Hence he decided that

64. Ibid. (Agrahayan-Magh) 1361 B. S.

* For details on this point please see the fourth chapter.

65. Autobiography, p. 27.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid., p. 30

it would be optional to adopt the Gayatri, and those who were unable to enter into the spirit of it were free to adopt any easier method of communion with God.

Next he felt, that for the communion with God the mantras should be the medium; these *mantras* should be comprehensive and describe His attributes.⁶⁸ So he promulgated a liturgy from the Upanishad.⁶⁹ This was,

Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma

Anandarupam Jatbibhati. (Brahma is Truth, Knowledge the Infinite).

To make it more conformable to Brahma religion, he, at the request of Shyamacharn Tarkabagish, a Tantrik Scholar, added one more stotra from the Tantra-Sastra. The new verse was,⁷⁰

Namaste sate te Jagatkaranaaya

Namaste chite te Sarbalokasraya

(Salute to the Creator of the Universe,

Salute to Him, the shelter of the Universe).

This form of worship was introduced in the Brahmo Samaj in 1845.

From the time of Rammohun, the Vedas had been accepted as the basis of Brahmoism. Debendranath also believed, at first, in the infallibility of the Vedas. At this time, the cultivation of the Vedic knowledge had become extinct in Bengal. He felt it necessary to acquire a knowledge of the true form of God as inculcated in the Vedas. Moreover, a suspicion arose in his mind, when challenged the soundness of Vedantic doctrines and also of the infallibility of the Vedas.* These two reasons inspired Debendranath to send

68. Ibid., Chap. X, p. 31.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid., Chap. X, p. 32.

* Duff in his book 'India and India Mission' brought many charges against the Vedas. In reply to this, Debendranath and Akshay Kumar Dutta wrote articles, which were published in the Tattwabodhini Patrika. (Aswin, 1766 Sak and Phalgun, 1766).

four Brahmins to read the Vedas in Varanashi in 1845.⁷¹ He himself read the Vedas thoroughly. The more he entered into the spirit of it, the more he found that the sages who composed the Vedas always believed in the supremacy of one Being. The worship of Durga and Kali and other gods and goddesses had not been inculcated in it.

To remove the false ideas and to acquire a knowledge of the evolution of ancient forms of worship, Debendranath started translating Rig-Veda, with the help of a Sanskrit Scholar.⁷² By going through the Upanishads, he found that there were one hundred forty seven Upanishads in place of eleven Upanishads.⁷³ He hesitated to lay the foundation of Brahmo-dharma on it. He also found in the Upanishads another point which opposed the prevalent Brahmo-opinion. He was dismayed at the idea of the Upanishad that the worship of Brahma leads to *nirvana* (salvation).⁷⁴ It meant that the soul also extinguished with the death. Then what should be the basis of the religion? He came to the conclusion that Brahma resided in the pure heart alone. So pure heart illumined by intellect should be the basis of Brahmoism.⁷⁵ To find out this truth Akshay Kumar Dutta contributed much. He was a man of keen intelligence and reason, he emphasised that no single book could be regarded as the basis of Brahmoism.⁷⁶

Thus during 1839-1849, the Vedantism of Rammohun underwent great changes and the actual observance of the principles of the Vedas took place in 1850. Debendranath said, "The Brahmo Dharma was built of the essential truths

71. Ibid., p. 40.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid., p. 74.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid., p. 80.

76. Roy, M. N. *Life of Akshay Kumar*, pp. 60-61.

contained in the Vedas and Upanishads and my heart was witness there unto."⁷⁷ He laid down the fundamental principles of Brahmoism in his *Brahmo dharma* and Brahmos were expected to follow these principles.

While Debendranath was engaged in reorganising the samaj, he also felt the need of preaching the faith to the different parts of Bengal. Sibnath Sastri wrote that, the Tattwabodhini Patrika played a great role in this respect.⁷⁸ During 1842-1859 Brahmoism was propagated in the districts of Midnapore, Dacca, Tipperah, Burdwan, and Krishnanagore. Thirteen centres of Brahmo Samaj were opened at the different places of Calcutta. The Dacca Brahmo Samaj was founded in 1846.⁷⁹ These different centres drew large number of adherents. In this work of propagation, the educated middle class played the most important role. Sibnath Sastri remarked that most of the adherents were "high officers under Government; and the movement was entirely a movement of the educated community of the time."⁸⁰

But it is not entirely true that the Brahmo-movement spread only among the educated middle class community. Some persons belonging to the lower strata of the society also came under its influence. Some Vaishnavas also accepted Brahmoism. Vijay Krishna Goswami, formerly a Vaishnava Pundit accepted the faith and influenced hundred persons in the village of Bagh-anchra.⁸¹ One Babu Nabin Chandra Roy founded a village; there many Brahmos of ordinary calibre came to settle. The place was known as Brahmo-gram.⁸² This wide propagation induced

77. Autobiography, p. 80.

78. Sastri, S. N. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 312.

79. Collet, S. D. *Brahmo Year Book*, p. 87.

80. Sastri, S. N. op. cit., Vol. II, p. 312.

81. Das, J. op. cit., p. 42.

82. Ibid.

W. Hunter to remark that the total number of Brahmos constituted at least one-eighth of the population of the district of Jessore.⁸³

Rammohun's social ideas

From his early life, Rammohun was conscious of the prevalent social abuses. When he was a young lad he was married according to the custom of the time. Soon after his father died, he had to marry two brides simultaneously.⁸⁴ Under the command of his father, who, evidently had been a strong advocate of kulinism. This event had created deep impression in Rammohun's mind and in later life he inserted a clause in his will disinheriting any son who might have more than one wife at the same time.

Not only did Rammohun oppose polygamy, he also did something positive to improve the lot of the women of Bengal of his times who had been subjected to inhuman oppression and made to suffer in the name of the Shastras, kulinism and *deshachar*. He found that sati had been widely prevalent in Bengal. Sometimes the young widows were forced by their relatives to burn themselves on the funeral pyre of their dead husbands. Sometimes they were burnt even long after the death of their husbands, known as *Anumaran*.* Rammohun noticed all these with horror; he used to visit the burning ghats of Calcutta personally and by earnest persuasions tried to prevent the widows from burning themselves. In the Asiatic Journal of 1818 two cases are recorded where the Raja's personal intervention resulted in saving the lives of two widows. But the Raja realised that

83. Hunter, W. *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. IV, p. 54.

84. Collet, S. D. op. cit., p. 115.

*In case of *Anumaran*, the widow burns herself with something that belonged to her husband. The thing may be a pair of *kharam* (wooden sandal) or shawl or something else.

the belief in the sati system was deep-rooted in the society. He, therefore, tried to carry on his agitation against sati through his tracts.

During the year 1818-1820, Rammohun wrote many tracts to show that nowhere in the Hindu Shashtra, the practice of burning the widows had been enjoined as a compulsory measure. In the first tract, entitled '*A Dialogue between an Advocate and opponent of Sati*' (1818), he pointed out that though sati had been permitted by some of the ancient Smritis and Puranas, Manu, the greatest law-giver of the Hindu had recommended an ascetic life in preference to self-immolation.⁸⁵ He also pointed out in it, that in the Vedanta, Sahamaraṇa and Anumaraṇa had been described as inferior to the life of Brahmacharya. He also drew attention to the fact that force was employed in some cases, which the Shastras had forbidden. He argued that the practice was a recent innovation and was not prevalent outside Bengal. He quoted from the Sastras and said that fire must be applied to the pyre before the widow ascended it, and she was free to retract and go back to her relatives.⁸⁶ Mrityunjay Vidyalankar expressed the same view against sati. Kasinath Tarkabagish, a Sanskrit scholar argued that the burning of widows was sanctioned by the Vedas. He argued that it was a sort of *deshachar* which must be respected like the injunctions of the Shastras. Rammohun replied to him in another pamphlet published in 1819.⁸⁷ In this pamphlet, besides condemning the practice of sati, he said that if it was allowed to be continued many other evils would be perpetuated. In order to defend the women and to carry out an all round campaign against sati, he discussed the relative merits of both men and women and

85. Nag and Burman, op. cit., part III, pp. 5-9.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid. pp. 36-37

spoke highly of the resolute, pious and honourable character of the women of Bengal.⁸⁸

Rammohun started a vigorous campaign against sati through the Journal 'Samvadkaumudi.*' Samachar Darpan, the organ of the missionaries supported him, Samachar Chandrika, the organ of the orthodox Hindus began to criticise bitterly the campaign against sati. In 1822, Rammohun wrote *Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females* in which he observed that the Hindu women burnt themselves so readily only to avoid hardships and ignominies which a widow's life entailed.⁸⁹ The movement against sati gained momentum and got the support of the government of Hastings.

The orthodox group, beaten in arguments, took to slandering. Small poems were composed to ridicule the efforts of Rammohun. There arose two distinct groups, one group which supported Rammohun, included Dwarakanath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Mathuranath Mullick, Kalinath Roy and other group headed by Radhakanta Dev included some rich and influential persons like Motilal Seal and Ramkamal Sen.⁹⁰ The agitation for the abolition of sati created so much bitterness that even Rammohun's life was in danger. The Raja, however, had been inspired by a noble ideal, and it was impossible for him to remain satisfied until his ideal was achieved.⁹¹ His constant advocacy for abolishing the sati urged the British Government to declare it illegal by enacting laws. Thus sati was abolished on December 4, 1829 by Lord William Bentinck.

88. Ibid. pp. 44-48.

* It first appeared in July, 1819.

89. Roy, R. *Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachment on the Ancient Rights of Females*, pp. 10-18.

90. Sastri, S. N. op. cit., Vol I, p. 41.

91. Dutta, R. C. *Literature of Bengal*, p. 143.

Rammohun's advocacy for ameliorating the condition of widows dated as far back as 1815. In a meeting of the Atmiya Sabha, Rammohun and his friends had condemned the practices of polygamy. The necessity of an infant widow passing her days in celibacy was criticised.⁹² In the brief remark regarding *Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females*, he pleaded for a change in the Hindu Law of inheritance so as to improve the lot of the Hindu widows. In the sixth issue of the *Samvad-Kaumudi* he appealed to the rich Hindus of Calcutta to establish a society for the relief of destitute widows on the model of Civil Military Widows fund, which had been established by the order of the Government.⁹³

Rammohun was very much shocked to see the wide prevalence of kulinism in Bengal. There were many instances of kulin marriage. A Government official of Barisal married six sisters one by one, their age ranging from four to twenty-five.⁹⁴ A letter was published in the *Samvad-kaumudi* stating the social misery caused by kulinism.⁹⁵ It stated that a lady who had never seen her father had been brought up in the house of her maternal-uncle. When she was quite grown up, her father came and married her to a very old man whom she did not see after marriage and passed her life as a cook in the family of her uncle. Another woman of Shantipur pointed out in a letter that a man was not blamed if he married after the death of his wife, but a woman was greatly accused if she wanted to marry again.⁹⁶ She appealed that the Government of Bengal should take interest in removing this social

92. *Asiatic Journal*, May, 1819.

93. Extract from *Samvad Kaumudi* cited in *Banglar Jatiya Itihaser Mul Bhumika* by J. Das, p. 99.

94. *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, Kartik, 1318 Sak.

95. Banerjee, B. N. op. cit., Vol II, p. 181.

96. Ibid, p. 186.

injustice. Perhaps, all these instances inspired some rich Hindus of Calcutta to send a petition to the Government against kulinism.⁹⁷ It may be said that Rammohun was behind the move to break the system of kulin marriage in Bengal.

It is stated by N. N. Chatterjee, Rammohun's biographer that the Raja advocated widow-marriage.⁹⁸ He expressed a desire to his friends that child-widows should be remarried. But we get a contrary view in his tract *Pathya Pradan*. He had however, advocated Saiva form of marriage. In this form of marriage, age and caste were no bar only the consent of both the parties was necessary. This led some scholars to think that he was perhaps in favour of inter-caste marriage.⁹⁹

Rammohun had a natural admiration and regard for the women in general. He also tried for the education of women, but could not achieve much in this respect. In a tract, he argued that it was wrong to deprive the women of education. He quoted examples showing that Maitreyi, Lilavati, Bhanumati, the wife of the prince of Karnat and that of Kalidas were reputed for their knowledge in the shastras. But the women of Bengal had never been given any opportunity of showing their natural capacity for learning; they were by no means inferior to men-folk in the field of education.

Rammohun was very critical of the caste system. To condemn the caste system, he translated into Bengali a chapter of the Sanskrit tract 'Bajra-Suchi'.¹⁰⁰ In it, he argued that all men were basically one. Brahmin, Kshatriya, vaishya and sudra—all these titles were super impositions

97. Chakraborty, S. C. (Ed.) op. cit., Part II, 74.

98. Chatterjee, N. N. op. cit., p. 138.

99. Banerjee, B. N. and Das, S. K. op. cit., Part III, p. 46.

100. Ibid., pp. 47-48.

to identify the man in the society. The soul (jibatma) was casteless. He himself crossed the seas and broke one of the most unreasonable restrictions imposed by the caste system that one who crossed the sea must lose the caste to which he belonged.

In the fourth issue of the *Samvad-kaumudi* Rammohun criticised the practice of arranging vile dances and other entertainments of low taste on the occasion of Durga-puja.¹⁰¹ He was also not in favour of spending a huge sum on the occasion of marriage or *shradh* ceremony. He remarked that money should be better utilised "in the commendable cause of national education".

Among those who realised the importance of English education and western culture as a means of removing age long old beliefs, and enlightening India, the name of Rammohun stands first.¹⁰² Rammohun assumed a prominent role when the orientalist clamoured for the progress of oriental education and the other group opposed it and demanded European Science and culture. When in 1823, the Government had decided to establish a Sanskrit College in Calcutta, he wrote a letter to Lord Amherst protesting against this reason.¹⁰³ He argued that the Sanskrit language on account of its "grammatical niceties" could not be the medium of instruction. It was a lamentable check of the diffusion of knowledge.¹⁰⁴ So he advocated a system of education "more liberal and enlightened embracing mathematics natural Philosophy, Chemistry and Anatomy with other useful science."¹⁰⁵ He consulted with Hyde East, the then Chief Justice and David Hare for the establishment of a college for the spread

101. Quoted in *Banglar Jatiya Itihaser Mul Bhumika* by J. Das., p. 72.

102. Sastri, S. N. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 56.

103. Collet, S. D. op. cit., p. 592.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

of western education. Accordingly, the Hindu College was established in January, 1817.¹⁰⁶ Though he was the prime mover in founding this college, he had to withdraw himself from the meeting because of the opposition of the orthodox Hindus with whom he had been engaged in religious controversy.¹⁰⁷

That the Raja was eager to open English schools for the Bengali-boys is proved by the fact that as early as 1816 he offered Carey of Serampore Mission a piece of land for building a school there.¹⁰⁸ Sometime in 1816-17, he built a school of his own at Suripara for the instruction of Hindu boys.¹⁰⁹ He afterwards opened an English school at his garden house. Very slowly, he was able to purchase a piece of land near Cornwallis Square and built a school house there. In 1822, he opened there the Anglo-Hindu School for imparting free-instruction in English to Hindu boys.¹¹⁰ He had no faith in secular education, so religious and moral instruction formed a part of the curriculum. Debendranath was one of the students of this institution. An eminent educationist like Sandford Arnot was on the teaching staff of this school. William Adam once came to inspect the school and spoke highly of it.

But Rammohun was not interested in spreading English education alone. He, with a view to propagating vedantic knowledge and defending Hindu Unitarianism, established the Vedanta College in 1826.¹¹¹ Some eminent Sanskrit-

106. Bagal, J. C. "The Hindu College", *Modern Review*, July, 1955.

107. Bagal, J. C. *Banglar Uchhasiksha*. p. 5.

108. Banerjee, B. N. "Rammohun Roy as pioneer of Education", *Journal of the Orissa and Bihar Research Society*, 1930, Part II

109. Ibid.

110. Majumder, J. K. *Rammohun Roy and the Progressive Movements*, pp. 264—65, 269—75.

111. Majumder, J. K. op. cit., pp. 262—263.

scholars were appointed there. In other colleges, the Vedanta Philosophy was taught in the old uncritical way; but Rammohun made the curriculum so much liberal as to make it a link between liberal Hindus and liberal Christians.

Rammohun was so liberal in his religious ideas, that he welcomed and helped the Scottish Mission to preach their faith in Bengal.¹¹² When Duff came to Calcutta, Rammohun arranged for him a school-house and asked the Hindu boys to read the Bible. Like Duff, he also believed that education should be based on religion, which would surely develop the power of mind. Though not a Christian, he himself read the Bible and declared that as a book on morality, it was unequalled.

Debendranath on social—problems

Debendranath was essentially a religious reformer. Throughout his life, he carried on religious-researches, yet often he used to reflect on social-problems. His social-ideas can be divided mainly under three heads, viz. (1) education, (2) widow-remarriage and inter-caste marriage (3) religious-rites.

Education—During the time of Debendranath, the movement of the Christian missionaries to preach their religion in Bengal was a significant factor. The speedy inroad of the missionaries and the conversion of Umesh chandra Sarker greatly agitated him.¹¹³ He wrote in the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* that the missionaries had earned popularity by establishing free schools, the Bengalees should also take care to open free schools and impart education to poor boys.¹¹⁴ For this purpose he organised a meeting in May, 1845 at the house of Radhakanta Deb. Accordingly, the

112. Sastri, S. N. op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 58-59.

113. Ghose, B. *Samayik patre* etc., Vol. II, p. 94.

114. Ibid., p. 96.

Hindu Hitarthi Vidyalaya was established in March 1846, in the house of one Radha Krishna Basak.¹¹⁵ Raja Radhakanta Dev was the President and Debendranath the secretary.¹¹⁶ Bhudev Chandra Mukherjee was appointed the Head Master of this school. It was a free school where education was imparted through the medium of Bengali and special attention was paid on the diffusion of Vedic knowledge, so that people could realise the futility of Christian-religion. Thus the school was intended to be an indirect check on the spread of Christianity.

Debendranath also realised the importance of mass-education. He wanted that people of all sections in Bengal should know reading and writing. In this connection, he wrote a letter in May, 1859 to J. P. Grant, Lt. Governor of Bengal.¹¹⁷ For mass education, he proposed that teachers should receive training in teaching first. He felt that adequate distribution of books and establishment of Normal Schools would facilitate the programme. Curriculum should comprise reading, writing and learning of correct spelling and rudiments of letter-writing.¹¹⁸ We may mention an incident which showed how eager was Debendranath for mass-education.¹¹⁹ The son of a prostitute named Hira Bulbul was admitted in the Hindu-College, when the administration of the institution was in the hands of the Government. The orthodox section of the Hindu society raised a hue and cry against it, but the authorities did not take any action. Finding that the opposition was so great as to jeopardise the cause of education, Debendranath took lead in withdrawing the boy.

115. Sastri, S. N. op cit Vol. I, p. 98

116. Ghose, B. Samayik Patre etc., Vol. II, p. 403.

117. Banerjee, B. N. "Debendranath on schools for the masses", *Modern Review*, December, 1928, p. 633

118: Ibid.

119. Bengal, J. C. "Siksha Bistare Debendranath, *Sahitya Parisad Patrika*, 1350 B. S. nos. 3.

Not only Debendranath advocated the cause of education, he was also associated with many cultural-associations of the time. As a member of the Sarvatattwadipika Sabha, Debendranath and his associate Jaygopal Vasu advocated for the improvement of the Bengali language.¹²⁰ He held the view that the development and progress of Bengali which was the mother tongue should receive priority. It is stated that on one occasion he refused to receive a letter as it was not written in Bengali. This strong love for the mother tongue can be cited as an example of his deep sense of patriotism.¹²¹ In an article in the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, he strongly criticised those who used to write letters in English to their countrymen.¹²² He wanted to discard the English language even in official correspondence.

Debendranath was in favour of female education upto the school stage, but he did not approve of higher-education for women. He sent his daughter Saudamini to Bethune-School.¹²³ He also did not like the idea that women should go to schools and colleges on foot without purdah and mix with others.¹²⁴ Perhaps, for this he wrote to his son Rabindranath that the idea of educating his daughter-in-law (the wife of Rabindranath) privately would be most suitable.¹²⁵ He strongly advocated the cause of female seclusion and denounced the western method of life, where-

120. Bengal, J. C. *Banglar Navya Sanskriti*, p. 15.

121. Ganguly, P. C. 'Maharshi Debendranath O Sarvatattwa dipika Sabha.' *Viswabharati Patrika*, (Magh-Chaitra) 1350 B. S. pp. 290-291.

122. *Tattwabodhini Patrika*. Aswin, 1798 Sak, pp. 98-102.

123. Bagal, J. C. Loc. cit, *Sahitya Parishad Patrika*, 1350 B. S. nos. 3, p. 68.

124. "Patravali" *Viswabharati Patrika* (Magh Chaitra) 1350 B. S. p. 297.

125. bid,

men and women moved freely in society.¹²⁶ He had the belief that the women did not possess the necessary concentration of mind as to worship the formless Brahma without any rituals for worship. So he prescribed that women should be allowed to use flowers and sandal-paste in their worship of the Brahma.¹²⁷

As a member of the *Samaj Unnati-Vidhayini-Samiti*, established in 1854, Debendranath advocated widow-remarriage and abolition of child-marriage.¹²⁸ But a contradictory idea had been stated in a letter to Rajnarain Bose, an eminent Brahmo and close associate of Debendranath. The news of the marriage of the two brothers of Rajnarain with two widow-girls set him in fury and he wrote to him that "widow re-marriage is a difficult thing in our society and this will divulge the Society into great disturbances."¹²⁹ It seems that Debendranath wanted the emancipation of women only by stages.

Debendranath introduced a reformed code of marriage, according to which Brahmos would take and give their children among themselves. It implied the absence of any religious rites. Many marriages were performed according to this code. Debendranath wanted that inter-caste marriages should be negotiated with caution. In a letter to Rajnarain in 1853 (Magh 8, 1775 Sak) he stated that as inter-caste marriages involved rejection of caste-rules, caste restrictions should be discarded first by the marrying parties

126. *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, 'Pous, 1797 Sak, pp. 161-164.

127. Chakravartty, A. L. *Maharshi Debendranath Tagore*, p. 104.

128. Bagal, J. C. loc. cit, *Sahitya Parishad Patrika* 1350 B. S. nos. 3, Sastri, S. N. Ramtanu etc. p. 66.

129 Bose, R. N. *Atmachārit*, pp. 98-100

before the marriage was solemnised.¹³⁰ In another letter written in 1861, (Ashar 7, 1783 Sak) he expressed his great apprehension about the result of unrestricted inter-caste marriages.¹³¹ He thought that it would surely create a commotion in the society, as the society was not prepared for it. He felt that the help of the Government was necessary for popularising it. In another letter, written in 1862, (Magh 13, 1784 Sak), he stated that Brahmos should not lay emphasis on the marriage rituals.¹³² If one could not arrange for gold ring and other things, such deficiencies should not stand in the way of marriage. Titles must not be changed in a Brahmo-marriage and marriage between brahmin and sudra was also allowed.

Debendranath strongly believed in the inherent good qualities in an individual. To maintain high social values those good qualities must always be nurtured and nourished. Religious education and social training were identical to Debendranath. For this reason he preached that one should meditate and resort to introspection from time to time, and, if possible, daily.¹³³ Although he had denounced the worship of a deity and images of gods, he always recognised the social value of mass congregation on religious occasions.*¹³⁴

130. Sastri, P. (ED.) *Debendranather Patravāli*, p. 32 (Letter no. 25).

131. Ibid.

132. Ibid., p. 37 (Letter no. 29).

133. *Dharmatāttwa*, Phalgun, 1789 Saka, pp. 875-876.

134. Tagore, D. N., *Autobiography*, p. 89.

* Perhaps, this was the reason why he allowed the continuance of Durgapuja in his ancestral house, and observed "Upanayana" of his children and "Sraddha" of his father, of course, in his own simple way.

Rammohun on Economic Problems of his time

After 1757, India was confronted with the problem of "economic drain." It had been estimated "that the total drain from Bengal to England during the period 1757 to 1780 amounted to about 38 million pound sterling."¹³⁵ This heavy drainage seriously put obstacles to the growth of Indian industries. As a remedy to this, Rammohun suggested colonisation and settlement in India of "cultured Europeans" whose savings might be vested in Indian industries. He suggested that "as a large sum of money is now annually drawn from India by Europeans retiring from it with the fortunes realised there, a system which would encourage Europeans to become permanent settlers with their families would necessarily improve the resources of the country."¹³⁶ But it is remarkable that he did not welcome Europeans of all classes, only Europeans of character should settle here, so that India might be benefitted by their contact.¹³⁷ Moreover he expected that cultivators in India would also be benefitted by the introduction of superior methods of cultivation of the English. Through closer contact with them, India would be able to cast off superstitious beliefs and learn the art of administration and legislation.

The Raja also advocated a legitimate share for the Indians in the administration which, he hoped would counteract economic drain to some extent. He noticed that European officials were appointed collectors and superintendents on a salary of thousand or fifteen hundred rupees

135. Majumder, R. C. Roychoudhury, H. C. & Dutta, K. K., *An Advanced History of India*, Part III, p. 807

136. *Raja Rammohun Roy : His Life Writings and Speeches*, p. 176

137. *Parliamentary Papers*, H/C, (1831-1832), Vol. 8, p. 203

per month, but the duties were chiefly performed by their Indian subordinates.¹³⁸ The Indian people in their own home land were constantly neglected by their British masters who had no knowledge of the country and the people. To solve this problem, and to reduce the cost of administration he suggested the appointment of Indians of respectability at a salary of three hundred or four hundred rupees in place of European Collectors.¹³⁹

The East India Company had the sole monopoly in manufacturing salt, opium and silk-industry. This monopoly over salt deprived the zamindars of their due share of the produce, though the salt was manufactured on their soil. There was country wide agitation against this salt-monopoly of the Company,¹⁴⁰ because the Company's salt-agents oppressed the villagers so much that they were almost reduced to the position of serfs. These salt manufacturers were known as "malangees".¹⁴¹ About one lac twenty five thousand 'malangees' were engaged in salt-manufacture. Rammohun observed before the Select Committee, "As salt has by long habit become an absolute necessity of life, the poorest peasants are ready to surrender everything else in order to procure a small proportion of this article...if salt was surrendered cheaper and better, it must greatly promote the common comforts of the people."¹⁴² The Raja demanded complete abolition of monopoly on this article.

The East India Company had the monopoly of trade in India. But there arose agitation that free trade was preferable as it would enhance commerce and industry.¹⁴³

138. Ghose, J. C. op.cit., Vol. II, p. 85.

139. Ibid., p. 87.

140. Ghose, B. *Samayik patre* etc., Vol. I, p. 57.

141. Ibid., p. 496.

142. Banerjee, B. N. "Answers of Rammohun to Querier on the salt monopoly." *Modern Review*, May, 1934, pp. 553-554,

143. *John Bull*, September 16, 1828.

Men like Dwarakanath greatly welcomed the idea of free-trade, because many countries of Europe would then invest their capital in trade with Bengal, which would evidently develop her industries.¹⁴⁴ But the zamindar of Bengal in order to please the Government of the East India Company supported the monopoly-trade. The John Bull considered the opinion as 'beneficial. But Rammohun though a zamindar himself did not support it. He joined hands with Dwarakanath in demanding the introduction of free-trade in India.¹⁴⁵

Rammohun also gave his attention to ameliorating the distressful condition of the peasants. In his evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons which he submitted in writing, he made vigorous suggestions to improve their lot. He said that neither the Permanent Settlement of Bengal nor the Ryotwari Settlement of Madras was beneficial for them. The Permanent Settlement created a class of revenue officers. These officers were worse than the zamindars; they made their fortune by bleeding the poor peasants white. In order to ameliorate their condition, the Raja suggested that "no further measurement or increase of rent on any pretence whatever should be allowed."¹⁴⁶ He even asked the Government to lower its demand upon the zamindars and the zamindars in turn should also make a proportionate reduction in the rent of the ryots. To make up the deficit in revenue, he suggested imposition of taxes on luxury goods.¹⁴⁷

In his attempt to further mitigate the miseries of the ryots, Rammohun made a few more suggestions. The judicial officers deciding cases of small debts against the

144. Tagore, S.N. *Bharate Silpa-Viplav* O Rammohun, p.76.

145. Ibid.

146. Ghose, J.C. op.cit., Vol.II, pp,65-66.

147. Ibid., p.85.

of salt by the East Indian Company. In 1778, the Company had monopolised the manufacture of salt. They had enacted a law by which manufacture of salt without licence was a criminal offence. Landholders were accountable for any such offence in their area. Debendranath pointed out the injustice underlying the provisions of the salt Act.¹⁵⁴ While Government earned huge revenue from salt-manufacture, the zamindars were to administer the provision of the Act, without deriving "any benefit out of it. Moreover, the village people were very poor and needy, and the oppression on them for a small quantity of salt produced by them for their domestic use was most unjust. Debendranath therefore, proposed the setting up of a commission to collect evidences and report on the administration of the provisions of Salt Act.¹⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

The religious movements of Bengal during 1800-1850 present three distinct trends. These are :

- (1) Decline of the original Hindu Religious ideals and system manifested by the immense popularity of the degenerated forms of Vaiṣṇavism and Sākta, Saiva and Vedic modes of worship ;
- (2) Advent of christianity subsequently obviated by the progress of the Brāhmo movement in its efforts to reform the decaying Hindu religious system ; and

151. Ibid.

152. Bagal, J. C. "Bharatvarsia Sabha". *Viswabharati Patrika*, (Sravana-Aswin), 1369 B. S.

153. *East Indian Pamphlet*, pp. 1-3.

154. *East Indian Pamphlet*, pp. 3-4

155. Ibid.

- (3) An effort to restore order in the old Hindu religious system by the original promoters of the Dharma Sabhā.

After Chaitanya's vigorous preaching against caste-system and for the attainment of divine blessings through 'bhakti', there followed a long period of fatigue and stagnation. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Bengal, this resulted in the growth of several sub sects. These subjects quickly degenerated, and the first half of the nineteenth century proved to be a social nuisance. Because of the absence of caste restrictions these subjects were popular mostly among the individuals of the lower order of the society, which had been devoid of any solid economic and intellectual foundation. Original vaiṣṇava devotional gatherings and songs degenerated and vulgarised into ākhrās of Nerā-Neri, Sakhibhāva-sādhakas, Spasādāy-akas, Sāins and Darbes. The last named subject, was the result of a combination of vaiṣṇavism and Sufi ideals of Islam, whereas the ākhrās of Nerā-Neris carried some resemblance of Buddhist monasteries. The influence of other religious and prevailing local customs and traditions ('lokāchar,' 'deshāchār,') in course of time degenerated and reduced the original bhakti movement into a process of laxity of morals, dwarfing of individual urge, or economic and intellectual progress and soiling of the "mahamanāba" image of Krishna and the godliness of Rādhā.

Amidst such chaos the authority of guru became formidable. Later on, the guru exercised high pontifical power and influence over the life and property of the disciples, so much so, that in many places brides immediately after marriage, were offered for the pleasure of the guru. The Kartābhajā and Kishorībhajā were milder forms of guruvād. Owing to the influence of a few ideals of the Buddhist and the Sufis, the Kartābhajā sect developed a kind of mysticism of its own which appeared supernatural to its members.

While the Kartābhajā worshipped and adored Krishna as their lover, benefactor and deliverer. the Kishorībhajā were the devotees of Rādhā.

The Bāuls, an offshoot of vaiṣṇavism was, however, reformed during the period under study at the instances of Lalan Fakir, Golak Chandra Banerjee and Harinaht Majumdar. These Bāul Sādhakas were real mystics in the time of the Sufis, and they imbued Sufi ideals afresh among other Bauls. Through their melodious voice and lyrical songs they roused the genuine religious feelings of people wherever they went. They were reputed for their purity of heart and love for social service. Even Rabindranath was moved by the songs and services of one of them, Lalan Fakir.

Besides vaiṣṇavism and its subjects, the traditional and shastric Gods and Goddesses of the Hindus were also worshipped with much pomp, gay, rustic ceremonies and extravagance. 'Gājan' and 'Charak' always attracted thousands of people to places of worship. These ceremonies were specially patronised by the rich merchants and landlords. Large fairs were organised during these festivals, where the dealers sold liquor, hemp, and narcotics in huge quantities, and the prostitutes lent their bodies on payment. Similar immoral excesses were resorted to by the Sāktas and Tāntrics, of course not in public. The scene of self-inflicted torture by the Gājan Sanyāsīs and those who used to take special vows during the Charak were awful and catered a primitive kind of recreation for the rustic and the so-called "Baboos".

Jagadhatri pūjā and Durgāpūjā were, however, performed with great solemnity everywhere. But the fairs and show of fire-works organised on these occasions by the rich people always attracted a crowd most of whom found pleasure in getting intoxicated or visiting the prostitutes, or in both. The genuine devotees and religious minded people always

performed pūjās in their private chapels at home with whatever means he or she could afford.

The cult of Satyapīr is peculiar to Bengal. The puranic deity Satyanārāyan turned into Satyapīr at the hands of Bengali Muslim converts from the low caste Hindus. But a Brahmin priest was, all the same, required for the worship of the deity and the 'sirni'—a recipe of the Muslims—was offered to the deity and distributed to the people assembled, both Hindus and Muslims. The Brahmins who performed such a ceremony came to be known as Husaini Brahmins—after King Husain Shah (1493-1519) of Bengal who had tried his best for the Hindu Muslim amity—and during the period under study they were gradually absorbed in the Muslim community. The Pirālī Brahmins, who also used to perform the pūjā of Satyapīr, however, dissociated themselves during this period from the profession of a priest. They were absorbed in the Hindu society, and were given a place below the original 'kulin' Brahmins. The Tagores were pirālī Brahmins who settled in Calcutta in East India Company's service and in private speculations.

Calcutta in those days was the seat of the "British Raj" in India. Most of the beneficiaries under the Permanent Settlement and the East India Company lived in Calcutta. Calcutta was the centre of all attraction and, what the residents of Calcutta did the rest of Bengal tried to imitate it. It represented a variegated society. Here, one could find at the same time the worst and best of all economic, political, social and religious institutions.

Here, Indian beggars and British bosses frequented the same road; policemen and pickpockets carried on with their professions in same public places; pious people and prostitute visited the same temple; and lakhs of rupees were spent on fire works, dancing girls, marriage and 'śradha' ceremonies, mock-marriages of pet animals, and other frivolous activities while indigent scholars taught

Sanskrit, Persian and vernacular languages to the English civilians privately on small fees and, meritorious boys from far off places prepared English lessons under utter privation for a post in the Government or the Agency Houses in future. Perhaps these had been the reasons as to why Rammohun chose Calcutta as the centre of his activities and settled there in 1815. He at once attracted the notice of the sundry and the select by his wealth, scholarship, magnanimity and free thinking.

Amidst such a religious atmosphere and social chaos, christianity, which had been claiming large number of adherents every year from the middle of the 17th century, at the beginning of the period under study, spread rapidly among the educated, the socially oppressed and the spiritually hungry people both in towns and villages of Bengal. The christian missionaries were further encouraged in their pursuits by the provisions of the Charter Act of 1813. But the printing press and English education introduced by them, to convey the message of Christ to the people, after some time came back as a boomerang on their mission itself. The Bengali society reacted violently against the anti-Hindu campaign by the missionaries and the irreligious wanton behaviour of the English educated youngmen. A number of pamphlets and articles were published to expose the missionaries. The chief pamphleteer during this period was Raja Rammohun Roy.

In the process of pamphleteering against the bigotry and immoral excesses of both the Christians and the Hindus, the religious and socio-economic ideas of Rammohan slowly crystallized. To translate into practice his religious ideas and save the society of Bengal he first started Atmiya Sabha, a study circle with his friends which in 1828 came to be known as Brahmo-Sabhā. This Sabhā under the leadership of Debendranath became an all-India movement which upheld the teachings of Veda, Vedānta and Upani-

shada, proclaimed the unity of Godhead, denounced caste restrictions, and directed its strength against all kinds of social and religious abuses and for the amelioration of the condition of women and the illiterate.

As a reaction to the activities of the Christian missionaries and those of Rammohun and his followers, the third trend in the religious history of the period emerged in Bengal. The members of the Dharma-Sabhā were orthodox Hindus. A number of them was well educated, had digested western ideas, and wanted religious reform. But majority of them were ill educated bigots who used to come to the Dharma-Sabha to please their wealthy patrons.

The religious movements of Bengal from 1800 to 1850 record in definite terms the need for religion to achieve progress and stability in society, the need for education and economic independence as measures of protection against religious and cultural aggrandisement as well as concentration of power and precipitation of vested interests and vices in religious institutions, the need for emancipation of womanhood to preserve social standard of morals and education, the importance of religion as a fountain of art and literature, the need for revision of religious texts and injunctions along with the march of time; and the need for digging into the past to find out ideas and methods for rejuvenating and resuscitating the present. In short, the religious controversies of this period sounded the death-knell of the old order—partly Hindu, partly Muslim, and mostly heterogenous and moribund. At the same time this marked the beginning of the modern era of reform in religion, society, politics and economy of India. How this process of reform started by Raja Rammohun Roy, indirectly assisted by the Christian missionaries and the well-meaning members of the Dharma Sabha, ultimately bore fruit and brought about the Indian Renaissance is another story—the characters and events of which fall outside the scope of the present work.

APPENDIX

(1)

Abhoy pade pran sapechi.

Ami ar ki jamer bhoy rekhechi.

Kalinam kalpataru, hridaya ropon karechi.

Ami deha beche bhaber hate Durganam kine enechi.

Deher madhye sujan je jan, tar gharete ghar karechi.

(2)

Ebar ami sar bhebechi.

Ek bhabir kache bhab sikhechi.

Je deshe rajani nai ma, se desher ek lok payechi.

Amar kiba diba kiba sandhya, sandhyake bandhya
karechi.

Ghum chuteche ar ki ghumai, joge jage jege achi.

(3)

Hate trisula ranga lathi, paridhane bagher chal.

Brisava bahane siva tridaler nath,

Jagare jagare bhai, satyer kotal,

Mukta hoila thakurer purvadwar.

(4)

Koilashe Parbati-Hara basiya dui Jana,

Parvati balen O Hara suna mor nivedan,

Parvati balen O Hara bali go tomare,

Nagare esheche sankha kine daya amare.

Anna bine channa chara sukail mukha,

Hen samaye sankha para tomar habe sukha.

(5)

Ami mosai, a daler chain, gosain boli jane,

Chare devata guru, apan jaru, O jan mantra phunki
kane,

Kalu, teli, basan mali baidya ba kayet hari, chandal
samet,

Amay pete, ghosh parate sobai jamayet.

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